

The Intellectual Consequences of Religious
Heterodoxy 1600–1750

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The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy 1600–1750

Edited by

Sarah Mortimer and John Robertson



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Cover illustration: Title page of the second edition of Hermann Witsius' *Aegyptiaca* (Amsterdam 1696). The work was a counterblast to those who argued that Egyptian religion was at least as old as that of the Biblical Hebrews. The issue of priority was a critical fault-line in the study of sacred history in the period, one of several points at which heterodoxy engaged with scholarship. Reproduced by kind permission of the Seeley Librarian, University of Cambridge.

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CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Notes on Contributors	ix
 Nature, Revelation, History: The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy 1600–1750	 1
<i>Sarah Mortimer and John Robertson</i>	
 Styles of Heterodoxy and Intellectual Achievement: Grotius and Arminianism	 47
<i>Hans W. Blom</i>	
 Human and Divine Justice in the Works of Grotius and the Socinians	 75
<i>Sarah Mortimer</i>	
 ‘The Kingdom of Darkness’: Hobbes and Heterodoxy	 95
<i>Justin Champion</i>	
 Henry Stubbe, Robert Boyle and the Idolatry of Nature	 121
<i>Martin Mulsow</i>	
 Heterodoxy and Sinology: Isaac Vossius, Robert Hooke and the Early Royal Society’s Use of Sinology	 135
<i>William Poole</i>	
 ‘Lovers of Truth’ in Pierre Bayle’s and John Locke’s Thought	 155
<i>S.-J. Savonius-Wroth</i>	
 Spinoza and the Religious Radical Enlightenment	 181
<i>Jonathan Israel</i>	
 Between Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Italian Culture in the Early 1700s: Giambattista Vico and Paolo Mattia Doria	 205
<i>Enrico Nuzzo</i>	

Conyers Middleton: The Historical Consequences of Heterodoxy	235
<i>Brian Young</i>	
David Hume's <i>Natural History of Religion</i> (1757) and the End of Modern Eusebianism	267
<i>Richard Serjeantson</i>	
Bibliography	297
Index	325

PREFACE

Like many other collections, this volume of essays originated in a conference, held under almost the same title, 'The intellectual consequences of religious heterodoxy 1650–1750', at St Hugh's College, Oxford on 14 and 15 March 2008. With one exception, all the essays were originally papers presented, in a much shorter form, to the conference; these have since been revised and enlarged. The exception is the opening essay by the editors, which was written after the majority of the revised contributions had been received. In several respects this essay combines the functions of introduction and conclusion: it ranges further than the individual contributions which follow it, both to provide them with a framework and to point the way beyond them.

We are grateful first of all to our contributors, both for their willingness to participate in the original conference and for the care and thoroughness with which they have revised and extended their papers in response to our own and the publisher's readers' suggestions. We are particularly grateful to Martin Mulsow, who was unable to attend the conference because of illness, but allowed his paper to be read, and subsequently revised it for publication. The publisher's readers made helpful, constructive suggestions, which we have followed wherever possible; we regret that it was not possible to include a paper on French Catholic heterodoxy.

Besides our contributors, other participants at the conference contributed actively to shaping discussion and taking the debate forwards. Two who gave papers but who could not contribute to the volume are Rosa Antognazza and Scott Mandelbrote; we particularly appreciate the latter's efforts to contribute in difficult circumstances. We are likewise most grateful to those who came from Italy: Silvana D'Alessio, Camilla Hermanin, Girolamo Imbruglia and Giuseppe Ricuperati. From within the United Kingdom and Ireland were Sharon Achinstein, Thomas Ahnert, Katy Barrett (who also took on a share of the organisation during the conference), Christopher Brooke, John Christie, Delphine Doucet, James Harris, Peter Harrison, Kevin Hilliard, Caspar Hirschi, Marian Hobson, Tim Hochstrasser, Howard Hotson, Wayne Hudson, Sarah Hutton, Nicholas Keene, Rhodri Lewis, Ted McCormick, Noel Malcolm, Matthew Niblett, and Laura Schwartz.

The conference was made possible by the financial support of the John Fell Fund and the Faculty of History of Oxford University, the British Academy and the Royal Historical Society: we remain very grateful to them all. Its smooth running owed much to the competence of the conference staff and kitchen of St Hugh's College.

The confidence and support of our publishers have been vital to this volume. We are most grateful to a succession of editors at Brill—Erica Pierik, Joëlle Horn, Rosanna Woensdregt and Wilma de Weert—for both encouragement and patience, and to the editors of Brill's *Studies in Intellectual History* for accepting the volume within the series.

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NATURE, REVELATION, HISTORY: INTELLECTUAL CONSEQUENCES
OF RELIGIOUS HETERODOXY C. 1600–1750

Sarah Mortimer and John Robertson

I

Heterodoxy was a rich and diverse phenomenon in early modern Europe, and is a subject of growing interest to intellectual historians. It has been explored from different angles in several recent collections, with fruitful results.¹ Nevertheless, we intend this volume—as we did the conference from which it derives—to address an aspect of the subject which seems to us to have been neglected, and thus to take the understanding of heterodoxy in new directions. Specifically, we wish to encourage historians to explore the consequences of heterodoxy for intellectual life. The chapters which follow do this in a variety of specific ways, across the fields of political thought, moral and natural philosophy, and the writing of history. In this opening essay, by contrast, we shall set the problem of heterodoxy's intellectual consequences in a broader framework. In doing so, we will raise more questions than the specific essays can answer; and we will direct attention towards aspects of the problem, particularly in relation to the Catholic intellectual world, which are less well covered in this collection. We regret that it has been impossible to cover every dimension of the subject in a single volume, but we hope in this contribution at least to outline the wider parameters of the problem, and thus demonstrate its rich potential for further investigation.

It is the premise of this volume that the intellectual consequences of heterodoxy have yet to receive the attention they deserve. There are several reasons for this. Too often, heterodoxy has been seen as the beginning of a high road leading to unbelief. A powerful teleology is likely to be at work here: when the 'modern' is equated with the 'secular', it is easy to

¹ Roger D. Lund (ed.), *The Margins of Orthodoxy. Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response 1660–1750* (Cambridge, 1995); John Brooke and Ian Maclean (eds.), *Heterodoxy in Early Modern Science and Religion* (Oxford, 2005); Martin Mulsow and Jan Rohls (eds.), *Socinianism and Arminianism. Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and cultural exchange in seventeenth-century Europe* (Leiden, 2005).

suppose that dissent from religious orthodoxy was a prelude to a repudiation of religion altogether. A critical role in this process is traditionally ascribed to the eighteenth-century movement of Enlightenment. A movement whose adherents were noted variously for their scepticism, rationalism and anti-clericalism, the Enlightenment is readily associated with the propagation of a secular outlook, which discounted when it did not deride otherworldly beliefs and aspirations. Whether as contributors to a late seventeenth-century 'crise de la conscience européenne', or simply as advocates of doctrinal minimalism and intellectual tolerance, the heterodox have often been counted among the 'origins' of Enlightenment.² The case is even stronger when heterodoxy can be associated with philosophical materialism, understood as a metaphysics which made the spiritual realm more or less redundant, if it did not absorb it entirely within the material—the particular doctrine of 'monism'. The most radical exponent of such an inclusive materialism was Baruch Spinoza: and those who joined Christian heterodoxy to Spinozist monism are liable to be viewed as prime begetters of secular modernity.³ It is our contention, nevertheless, that this teleology has distorted understanding of early and pre-Enlightenment heterodoxy and its consequences. To assume that heterodoxy was the harbinger of secularism discounts not only its doctrinal and intellectual complexity, but what made it so attractive and exciting to its exponents.

When heterodoxy has been studied in its own terms, it has been in the context of natural philosophy, and not moral or political philosophy. Scholars have been alert to the potential for heterodoxy implicit in the search for ancient philosophical alternatives to Aristotelian natural science, although they have still been inclined to see heterodoxy as a by-product of these new philosophical commitments. First in the field, in the sixteenth century, was Neo-Platonism, whose application to natural

² Paul Hazard, *La crise de la conscience européenne* (1935), English translation: *The European Mind 1680–1715* (1953, Harmondsworth, 1964); H. R. Trevor-Roper, 'The religious origins of the Enlightenment', in idem, *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (London, 1967).

³ A proposition now indelibly associated with Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001); *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (Oxford, 2006); *A Revolution of the Mind. Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton, 2010). But Israel's argument is often understood in overly simplified terms: see below, in this introduction (43), and Israel's own contribution to the volume (181–203). An interest in materialist heterodoxy is also characteristic of a powerful tradition of Italian scholarship, whose leading exponents include Giuseppe Ricuperati and Silvia Berti.

philosophy by Cardano, Della Porta, Campanella and Bruno aroused the suspicions, and, in the case of the last two, renegade Neapolitan Dominicans that they were, the retribution of the ecclesiastical authorities. Even the milder 'Cambridge Platonism' of the seventeenth-century English philosophers Ralph Cudworth and Henry More, while it did not lead to prosecution, was subject to the taint of heterodoxy.⁴ But in the seventeenth century the greatest danger to orthodoxy has been seen to lie in the appeal of various strands of ancient atomism, Democritean, Epicurean and Lucretian. Adoption of atomism was the basis for one of the most serious accusations of heresy against Galileo;⁵ and for all the efforts of Gassendi and Boyle to demonstrate the compatibility of Epicureanism with Christianity, orthodoxy, especially Roman Catholic orthodoxy, remained suspicious.⁶ But the movement was not always from philosophy to heterodoxy, as some historians have recognised. In one very prominent case, it has been argued, Christian heterodoxy was fundamental to a new cosmology: it was an Arian, even a Socinian God who had created and continued to sustain Isaac Newton's universe.⁷

The contrast between this sensitivity to the possibility of heterodoxy in natural philosophy and the attitude adopted by many historians of early modern political thought could scarcely be more marked. It has been almost the professional deformation of Anglophone historians of political

⁴ On the Cambridge Platonists, see the subtle and varied studies of Sarah Hutton, among them, 'Platonism and the Trinity: Anne Conway, Henry More and Christoph Sand', in Mulsow and Rohls, *Socinianism and Arminianism*, 209–224; idem, 'Iconisms, enthusiasm and Origen: Henry More reads the Bible', in A. Hessayon & N. Keene (eds.), *Scripture and Scholarship in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2006), 192–207.

⁵ Pietro Redondi, *Galileo Heretic* (Harmondsworth, 1989).

⁶ On Gassendi and Boyle: Margaret J. Osler, 'When did Pierre Gassendi become a libertine?' in Brooke and Maclean, *Heterodoxy in Science and Religion*, 169–92; 'Ancients, Moderns, and the history of philosophy: Gassendi's Epicurean project', in Tom Sorrell (ed.), *The Rise of Modern Philosophy. The tension between the new and the traditional philosophies from Machiavelli to Leibniz* (Oxford, 1993), 129–43; 'The intellectual sources of Robert Boyle's philosophy of nature: Gassendi's voluntarism and Boyle's physico-theological project', in R. Kroll, R. Ashcraft and P. Zagorin (eds.), *Philosophy, Science and Religion in England 1640–1700* (Cambridge, 1992), 178–198.

On the continued suspicion of the Roman Catholic authorities towards atomism (but also their inability to arrive at a tenable definition of the erroneous philosophy), Maria Pia Donato, 'Scienza e teologia nelle congregazioni romane: la questione atomista', in Antonella Romano (ed.), *Rome et la science moderne: entre Renaissance et Lumières* (Ecole Française de Rome, 2008), 595–634.

⁷ Stephen D. Snobelen, 'The true frame of Nature: Isaac Newton, heresy and the reformation of natural philosophy', in Brooke and Maclean, *Heterodoxy in Science and Religion*, 323–62, and 'Isaac Newton, Socinianism and the "one Supreme God"', in Mulsow and Rohls, *Socinianism and Arminianism*, 241–98.

thought that they don't do religion. This lack of interest in heterodoxy is not due to negligence, but to a conscious choice by some practitioners to define modern political thought in opposition to religion—with the consequence that these practitioners have sought to exclude from their realm intellectual systems in which theology played an important part. Ironically, such a rejection of theology may be traced to the realisation that one major early modern political philosopher, long canonised as a founding father of modernity, had derived his most fundamental propositions from divine authority. When John Dunn recognised that Locke's account of contract was grounded in a conception of Natural Law and hence of human duties as God's commands, he opened a fissure in the study of early modern and Enlightenment political thought.⁸ Some scholars have, indeed, attempted to refine Dunn's understanding of Locke's Christianity, pursuing the hints in Locke's papers that he may have been interested in, even an adherent of Socinianism.⁹ But for many others the implication of Dunn's finding is critical: in the words of Istvan Hont, Locke must be excluded from 'modernity', on the ground that his political theory was 'irredeemably Christian'.¹⁰

Made wary of Locke, historians of political thought turned instead to those whose philosophy could more easily be made independent of their theology. Within the seventeenth century, attention shifted back to Hobbes. The suggestion of an earlier generation of Hobbes scholars, headed by Howard Warrender, that Hobbes' concept of Natural Law required a divine foundation was briskly dispatched, by Quentin Skinner on contextual grounds and David Gauthier on internal ones.¹¹ Thereafter most scholars have been confident in interpreting Hobbes as a secular thinker,

⁸ John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke* (Cambridge, 1969).

⁹ David Wotton, 'Locke: Socinian or Natural Law Theorist', in J. Crimmins (ed.), *Religion, secularization and political thought* (London, 1989), 39–67; John Marshall, 'Locke, Socinianism, "Socinianism" and Unitarianism', in M. A. Stewart (ed.), *English Philosophy in the Age of Locke* (Oxford, 2000), 111–182. More generally, John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge, 2006), and Ian Harris, *The Mind of John Locke. A study of political theory in its intellectual setting* (Cambridge 1994, rev. ed. 1998).

¹⁰ Istvan Hont, writing in a *Festschrift* for John Dunn: 'Adam Smith's history of law and government as political theory', in Richard Bourke and Raymond Geuss (eds.), *Political Judgement* (Cambridge, 2009), 134.

¹¹ Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Oxford, 1957); criticised by Quentin Skinner, 'The context of Hobbes's theory of political obligation', first published in the *Historical Journal* in 1966, revised and updated as 'The context of Hobbes's theory of political obligation', in *Visions of Politics III Hobbes and Civil Science* (Cambridge, 2002), 264–86; and by D. P. Gauthier, 'Why ought one obey God? Reflections on Hobbes and Locke', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 7 (1977).

whose recourse to scriptural evidence in *De Cive*, and more extended discussion of the true principles of a Christian Commonwealth in *Leviathan*, were inessential to his derivation of the grounds and purpose of a civil commonwealth from Natural Right and Natural Law.¹²

Moving forward from the seventeenth century, a different set of scholars has focussed attention on the political and social thought of the Scottish Enlightenment, in the works of David Hume, Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and John Millar. Here inspiration came from another scholar of the previous generation, Duncan Forbes, whose own first work had been on 'the Liberal Anglican idea of History'.¹³ Nevertheless, Forbes's Scottish Enlightenment was driven by the secular-minded Hume, Smith and Millar, with Ferguson as their 'Moderate' Presbyterian foil.¹⁴ Having studied Forbes's Special Subject at Cambridge (along with both Quentin Skinner and John Dunn) Nicholas Phillipson took the lead in further investigation of the Scottish Enlightenment in the 1970s; with the publication in 1983 of *Wealth and Virtue*, a volume devoted to the content and contexts of Scottish political economy, this field too seemed almost free of religious associations.¹⁵ More generally, historians of early modern and Enlightenment political thought have found it hard to resist the temptations of the 'Straussian' contention that serious political thought in an age of religious authority is likely to have been esoteric, conveying hidden secular meanings even when it drew on scripture. Even a scholar as critical of others' neglect of religious allegiance as David Wootton is also a dedicated seeker after covert atheism.¹⁶

Heterodoxy has not been entirely banished from the history of political thought, however, and not least because its implications for the Church

¹² Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories. Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge, 1979), and *Hobbes* (Oxford, 1989); Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge, 2008), along with many others.

¹³ Duncan Forbes, *The Liberal Anglican Idea of History* (Cambridge, 1952).

¹⁴ Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge, 1975); 'Sceptical Whiggism, commerce and liberty' in R. H. Campbell & A. S. Skinner (eds.), *Essays on Adam Smith* (Oxford, 1975), 179–201; and his edition of Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Edinburgh, 1966).

¹⁵ Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue: the shaping of political economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983); an exception to the prevailing secular reading of the Scottish philosophers was James Moore and Michael Silverthorne's contribution on Gershom Carmichael.

¹⁶ David Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi between Renaissance and Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983); at the other end of our period: 'Narrative, irony and faith in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, in David Womersley (ed.), *Edward Gibbon: Bicentenary Essays* (Voltaire Foundation: Oxford, 1997), 203–34.

could be so dramatic. One scholar in particular has resisted the trend. For long John Pocock's article 'Time, history and eschatology in the thought of Thomas Hobbes' stood alone as an exploration of Hobbes's engagement with the sacred in Parts III and IV of *Leviathan*.¹⁷ By Pocock's own account, however, it was because his study of early modern English political thought centred on Harrington, rather than Hobbes, that he became aware that the debate was always concerned with church as much as state. By the late seventeenth century, he has come to argue, the issue for the Church of England, and for Protestant churches more generally, was whether the Church was indeed Christ's body, divine in nature, and therefore independent of any state, or simply a forum for the debate of Christ's message. The latter, he argues, was the 'Socinian' position, one he finds widely held by latitudinarian Anglicans, Arminian Huguenots, and Moderate Presbyterians; it was as compatible with upholding a single Church of England by law established, as with toleration of an array of 'voluntary' Dissenting churches, each offering its own understanding of the path to salvation. The history of heterodoxy, Pocock thus reminds us, is not easily separated from that of orthodoxy; and both are relevant to the historian of political thought.¹⁸

Recently, the barriers between theology and political thought have become more permeable. Pocock's willingness to explore the second half of *Leviathan* has begun to be replicated in Hobbes scholarship. There is now an outstanding study of Hobbes's Biblical criticism by Noel Malcolm, setting its provocations in perspective.¹⁹ In addition, Hobbes's understanding of Christianity, the precise nature and degree of its heterodoxy, and its relation to his concept of Natural Law are all back in question (as we shall see later in this introduction).²⁰ The case of the Scottish Enlightenment is not dissimilar. The prosecutions of the 'atheist' Thomas Aikenhead and the 'Arian' or at least 'Arminian' John Simson have both been

¹⁷ John G. A. Pocock, 'Time, history and eschatology in the thought of Thomas Hobbes', in idem, *Politics, Language and Time. Essays on Political Thought and History* (London, 1971), 148–201.

¹⁸ John G. A. Pocock, 'Within the margins: the definitions of orthodoxy', in Lund (ed.), *The Margins of Orthodoxy*, 33–53; further in *Barbarism and Religion, Vol. I The Enlightenment of Edward Gibbon* (Cambridge, 1999), 19–27; 'Historiography and Enlightenment: a view of their history', *Modern Intellectual History*, 5 (2008), 83–96.

¹⁹ Noel Malcolm, 'Hobbes, Ezra and the Bible: the history of a subversive idea', in idem, *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford, 2002), 383–431.

²⁰ See, for a start, Patricia Springborg, *The Cambridge Companion to Leviathan* (Cambridge, 2007), Parts III and IV.

studied,²¹ while we now have sophisticated interpretations of the careful orthodoxy of Gershom Carmichael and the more agile theological liberalism of Francis Hutcheson.²² It is true that in their reasoned unbelief, David Hume and, perhaps more debatably, Adam Smith, stand as obstacles to a 'religious' reading of the Scottish Enlightenment, in however heterodox a key. But Enlightenment in Scotland was not a seamless triumph for secular political and social thought.

Pocock's insights, it seems, are becoming less exceptional. Historians of political and social thought are broadening their focus, and beginning to include possible intellectual consequences of heterodoxy among their enquiries, after the example of some students of natural philosophy. Moreover, and more important, the importance of heterodox theologies in bringing their proponents to re-interpret and re-imagine the civil as well as the natural world is becoming clear. For, as the next sections will make clear, it was very often deeply Christian commitments which led men (and some women) to question prevailing intellectual assumptions—and even to propose new visions of the political world.

II

As a term, 'heterodoxy' appears to have come into use in the seventeenth century; since then, historians have made it a term of art more widespread in its application than its first users may have anticipated. Literally 'other teaching', *heterodoxy* was always dependent on the definition of *orthodoxy* itself. Augustine had defined orthodoxy as the doctrine

²¹ Michael Hunter, '“Aikenhead the atheist”. The context and consequences of articulate irreligion in the late seventeenth century', in M. Hunter and D. Wootton (eds.), *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1992); Michael F. Graham, *The Blasphemies of Thomas Aikenhead. Boundaries of belief on the eve of the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 2008); Anne Skoczylas, *Mr Simson's Knotty Case. Divinity, Politics and Due Process in Early Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Montreal, 2001). Though fuller, Graham's study of the Aikenhead trial is slighter than Hunter's, while Skoczylas's focus is on procedure, and casts disappointingly little light on Simson's alleged heterodoxy, which she is inclined to deny.

²² James Moore and Michael Silverthorne, 'Gershom Carmichael and the natural jurisprudence tradition in eighteenth-century Scotland' in Hont and Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue*, 73–87, see also their introduction to *Natural Rights on the threshold of the Scottish Enlightenment. The Writings of Gershom Carmichael* (Indianapolis, 2002). On Hutcheson, James Moore, 'Hutcheson's theodicy: the argument and contexts of *A System of Moral Philosophy*', in Paul Wood (ed.), *The Scottish Enlightenment. Essays in Reinterpretation* (Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000), 239–66; and James Harris, 'Religion in Hutcheson's moral philosophy', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 46, (2008), 205–22.

and conduct of the Catholic faith; by implication it was contained within the third of the four 'notes' of the true church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic).²³ But definition of orthodoxy was always a process, even within the early church.²⁴ The earliest converts professed their faith when they were baptised, and the formula used soon became known as the 'rule of faith'. By the second century, Christianity possessed a fairly stable set of texts and doctrinal statements; and the many theological disputes of the next three centuries encouraged church leaders to spell out in ever more detail the content of their faith. From the fourth century, this task was attributed to councils, beginning with the Council of Nicea (325). These added a further party to the process. Although they were composed of ecclesiastical experts, the councils' decisions were endorsed and enforced by the temporal (that is the imperial) power. By 451, when the Council of Chalcedon met, the Western Church (and the Empire which sustained it) had not only defined orthodoxy, but agreed on a long list of errors—'heresies'—which were worthy of damnation. In determining the central tenets of Christian orthodoxy—the Trinity, Incarnation, original sin—the Councils relied upon the metaphysical and philosophical language of the world around them; the scriptures were interpreted in accordance with current theological and philosophical convictions. Not surprisingly, the resulting definitions of orthodoxy soon proved to be controversial, and the Councils bequeathed two dilemmas to later Christians. What was the relationship between orthodoxy and the scriptural text? And should the definition of orthodoxy remain fixed? No answer would be without awkward implications.

The Councils had not only stabilised orthodoxy, at least for the time being. They had attached Christianity firmly to Roman imperial authority and patronage, while presenting it as the universal religion, and the sole framework for understanding the relationship between God and the world he had created. Through the doctrine of the Trinity they had ensured that the work of both Christ and the Holy Spirit extended through time and space, making them relevant to all human beings. Christianity was not, they insisted, a local cult, like the many religions of the Greek and Roman

²³ Jacques Le Brun, 'Orthodoxie et hétérodoxie: l'émergence de la notion dans le discours théologique à l'époque moderne', in S. Elm, E. Rebillard, A. Romano (eds.), *Orthodoxie, Christianisme, Histoire* (Ecole Française de Rome, 2000), 333–42.

²⁴ On definition as process: S. Elm et al., 'Introduction' to idem, *Orthodoxie, Christianisme, Histoire*, viii–xxv. See also Mark Edwards, *Catholicity and Heresy in the Early Church* (Farnham, 2009), esp. 2–9.

world, nor was it limited to one particular group of people who heard Christ's message. Instead it was the one true path to redemption for sinful mankind. The Imperial authorities signed up to this vision, and mechanisms were created for enforcing Christianity within the Roman Empire.²⁵

Western European life could therefore be understood within a Christian framework, in which ecclesiastical and secular authorities worked hand in hand; and this remained the theoretical ideal until at least the seventeenth century. Medieval scholars provided the conceptual underpinning for co-operation between church and civil power, demarcating the domains of nature and of grace and showing the harmony between them. They emphasised the legitimacy of both secular and ecclesiastical power—and they developed the conceptual tools with which to define and defend orthodoxy. Given these strong connections between civil and spiritual life, heterodoxy became recognised as both a theological and a political problem, to be dealt with through both civil and ecclesiastical channels.²⁶

The problems of defining and enforcing orthodoxy returned with a vengeance when the Reformation tore the Western Church apart at the beginning of the sixteenth century. At first there was a natural tendency to identify orthodoxy and error with positions debated during the first five centuries of the church. But it soon became clear that this was an inadequate response to the issues at stake, and an insufficient (if still handy) line of defence for either Reformers or their opponents. The process of Reformation and Counter-Reformation renewed but also redefined orthodoxies; it revitalised the fear of heresy, but also opened up, between orthodoxy and heresy, an effectively uncontrollable grey area of heterodoxy. At the same time, it reinforced the confessional dimension to European life, as churches and states combined to create structures that would bind together the religious and the political sides of human life.²⁷

Martin Luther had claimed that the scriptures were clear and sufficient to all who read them with the eye of faith, but it quickly became evident

²⁵ On Constantine's role see A. Cameron, 'Constantine and the "Peace of the Church"' in ed. M. Mitchell & F. M. Young (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity. I: Origins to Constantine* (Cambridge, 2006, repr. 2008), 538–551 esp. 544–8.

²⁶ E.g. R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (Oxford, 1987); M. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation* (Oxford, 3rd edition, 2002).

²⁷ On confessionalization—and the limits of this concept—see J. Headley, H. Hillerbrand and A. Papalas (eds.), *Confessionalization in Europe, 1555–1700: Essays in Honour and Memory of Bodo Nischan* (Aldershot, 2004).

that not all readers interpreted the Biblical text in the same way. Authority, both ecclesiastical and political, was necessary to maintain unity among believers. Although Protestants, both Lutheran and Reformed, refused to abandon the original commitment to scripture, they still sought anxiously to control and limit the variety of individual readings. As the Protestant movement itself fractured, its churches armed themselves with confessional statements which defined their own position. By making their faith 'propositional', they hoped to maintain their own doctrinal purity, while presenting themselves and their theology in a clear and compelling manner. This need to define their doctrine in Confessions of Faith did not diminish in the seventeenth century: the Canons of Dort (1618), the Westminster Confession (1644) and the Helvetic Consensus (1675) were only the most notable of a series of such attempts at stating Reformed orthodoxy. Such statements, however, were necessarily also appeals to the laity for their support; in practice, they were appeals to the temporal powers—to the several estates of the United Provinces and their stadholders, to the Parliament of England, and to the magistrates of Geneva and other Swiss cities—for the exercise of authority without which orthodoxy would be unenforceable. From the start the Protestants called upon magistrates to fulfill their responsibilities to the true religion, thereby strengthening the alliance between civil and spiritual authority.

In countering the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church was able to adopt a more unified, centralising strategy; moreover, it could always maintain greater independence from temporal rulers. Once the papacy felt sufficiently confident of its position to convene a council, the way was clear for the latter to redefine the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church. The decrees and canons of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) would stand, without the need for further conciliar review, for the remainder of the period and beyond. They would do so, however, because the papacy had already equipped itself with the instruments required to clarify the Council's meaning and enforce its intentions, in the system of 'congregations' of cardinals meeting regularly in Rome. At the head of these was the Inquisition, or Holy Office, reconstituted as a congregation of cardinals in 1542. Through the Holy Office, the papacy would re-assume the responsibilities and powers which the temporal authorities wielded on behalf of the churches in the Reformed world. Within the effective range of his authority (most obviously within Italy), the Pope was again emperor in his own church.

All the churches—Lutheran, Reformed and Roman Catholic—were agreed that those who opposed them were guilty of 'heresy', of persis-

tent error and obstinate disobedience. ‘Heresy’ was the category inherited from the early church, and it had lost none of its venom: the consequence of heresy was damnation. At worst, and commonly, this meant exposure and eradication, justified with reference to the eternal laws of God if civil law proved insufficient. Calvin’s Geneva set an early example—to both the Protestant and the Roman Catholic worlds—by the trial and execution of Michael Servetus in 1547, for questioning the doctrines of the Trinity and infant baptism. Servetus was not a citizen of Geneva, and it was not clear that the city could do more than banish him, but Calvin insisted that such heinous crimes deserved a capital penalty. A person who denied the Trinity blasphemed against God, while one who rejected infant baptism denied the unity of the civil and spiritual communities; such people could not, Calvin argued, be allowed to live. After this, Protestants never renounced the fight against heresy, but—as the case of Servetus suggests—they tended to concentrate their efforts on the more extreme opinions among their ranks.

The Catholic Church was far better equipped to eliminate heresy, at least in its own territories. Once Cardinal Carafa, having become Pope Paul IV, had won his struggle within the Curia against Cardinal Morone, leader of the compromising ‘Spirituali’, in the 1550s, the Inquisition became the papacy’s weapon of spiritual war. The Inquisition’s method of choice was confession, understood not merely as private penance, but, Adriano Prosperi has argued, as the admission of the names of all possible collaborators in heresy, leading to their public punishment, and usually execution. Offending propositions were carefully categorised, by both doctrinal content (*haeretica, erronea*) and psychological intent, which might include ‘temerity’ (*temerarius*), ‘scandal’, and ‘ambivalence’. To the temporal authorities, whose co-operation was required, even in Italy, the Church identified heresy with *lèse majesté*—treason—insisting that it was in their interest as much as in the Church’s to eradicate it. But the process of discovery and punishment imposed by the Holy Office made it clear that the greatest treason was to the authority of the papacy itself.²⁸

Yet no early modern church, not even the Roman Catholic Church, could define and therefore suppress all dissent as ‘heresy’. The need

²⁸ Adriano Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza: inquisitori, confessori, missionari* (Turin, 1996, new edition, 2009), Part I. On the definition of ‘error’ (at some length): Bruno Neveu, *L’erreur et son juge. Remarques sur les censures doctrinales à l’époque moderne* (Naples, 1993), but esp. 240–9. For a recent general study of the Holy Office in English: Christopher Black, *The Italian Inquisition* (New Haven and London, 2009).

to appeal to the laity invited them to contribute their expertise to the cause, and thus to reinforce theology with insights drawn from other disciplines, notably law, medicine and natural philosophy. Although the earliest Reformers had been sceptical of the value of human knowledge when it came to matters of faith, their successors soon overcame any such qualms. Instead, they began to draw on all the academic resources available in their efforts to promote their own version of Christianity and to counter the arguments of their adversaries. The Catholic Church was no less willing to engage scholars in its cause. The bitter theological warfare which followed the Reformation was conducted mostly by university professors, anxious to defend their own confessional truths through scholarship and learning. The result was a pan-European contest for Christian truth, in which all sides sought to make their own theological claims as persuasive as possible. Nor could such involvement be limited to those with academic training: self-educated laymen and women also demanded that their interpretations of doctrine be taken seriously. Christianity was thus interpreted and re-interpreted by men and women who brought to the Bible their own intellectual gifts, assumptions and pre-occupations. But by calling upon the laity to contribute its intellectual resources to the cause, and by invoking the aid of secular rulers, the clergy made it much harder for themselves to maintain a monopoly over the definition of orthodoxy.

This was especially true in Protestant northern Europe, where versions of the doctrine of Erastianism proved enduringly popular. Powerful lay elites were rarely minded to leave ecclesiastical jurisdictions with much independent scope for action. Even where, as was usual, one Protestant church was recognised by the state, 'dissenters' might be too well established to be eliminated without threatening the public peace. In such cases, the temporal authorities might sanction, and the churches might accept, a policy of 'toleration'. As Hans Blom and other Dutch historians have emphasised, toleration was less a principle of parity than a practice of exclusion.²⁹ Those who disagreed with and defied the orthodox doctrine of the Reformed Church must be excluded from it, but might then be left to worship in peace in their own churches, at the discretion of the magistrate. Even so, the dissenters' freedom to worship independently

²⁹ Hans Blom, 'Styles of heterodoxy and intellectual achievement: Grotius and Arminianism', below, 47–73; R. Po-Chia Hsia & H. F. K. Van Nierop (eds.), *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge, 2002).

was also a freedom to determine their own doctrine. It was an admission that within the Protestant camp, at least, not all disagreement was outright heresy. There was a place, ill-defined and contested but potentially extensive, for other teaching—for 'heterodoxy'.

Again, the Roman Catholic Church was far better placed to counter the dangers inherent in calling upon the laity for reinforcement. With the tactical flexibility which characterised the Counter-Reformation, it found a novel means of maintaining its influence with temporal rulers without compromising its independence. Individual priests, secular and regular, but above all members of the Society of Jesus, were inserted into royal and princely courts as confessors. In any case, since the Roman fulfilled all the marks of the true church, being one, holy, catholic and apostolic, there could be no question of tolerating dissenters. Toleration, it is worth reminding ourselves, was never admitted as a practice, let alone a principle, within the early modern Roman Catholic Church. When Celestino Galiani, an enquiring Neapolitan theologian working in Rome in the opening decades of the eighteenth century, lamented the prohibition of books of modern philosophy, and privately observed '*convien aver tolleranza e lasciargli fare*'—it would be appropriate to show tolerance and let them circulate—his correspondent, the Florentine mathematician Guido Grandi, responded '*convien haver pazienza*'—we should show patience: ours is a church, Grandi reminded Galiani, founded on simple fishermen, not on learning.³⁰ Even where, as in France, the monopoly of the Roman Congregations of the Inquisition and the Index in determining and punishing erroneous doctrine was disputed by the Theology Faculty of the Sorbonne, by the Parlements and by the crown, there was no interest in toleration. And yet, this could not exclude all room for manoeuvre, even within the Roman Catholic Church. The very complexity of the Church, the multiplication of institutions and orders which competed with each other for jurisdiction and influence over the Curia and the papacy, created space for discussion of orthodoxy, and hence, in effect, for the airing of heterodoxy.

Faced with strong pressures towards orthodoxy, dissenters could not survive on intellectual commitment alone. Just as orthodoxy relied on temporal authority for its enforcement, the persistence of heterodoxy depended on division among the authorities, especially in Protestant

³⁰ *Celestino Galiani—Guido Grandi: Carteggio 1714–1729*, ed. F. Palladino & L. Simonutti, (Florence, 1989), pp. 42–8: Galiani to Grandi, 20 July 1714, Grandi to Galiani, 30 July 1714.

lands. In the United Provinces, the Arminians relied on the Estates of Holland to defend them against the Calvinists; it was when the Estates were outmanoeuvred by the Stadholder, and his principal opponent, the Grand Pensionary of Holland, Oldenbarnevelt, was put on trial and executed, that the Calvinists were able to triumph at the Synod of Dort. But it did not take long for the Estates to rally, and thus for the second generation of Arminians, or Remonstrants, to re-establish themselves under the spiritual leadership of Episcopius. Once the temporal authorities had divided, moreover, they found it difficult to draw a line under heterodoxy. The Estates tried to do so at anti-Trinitarianism, which was banned by law in the United Provinces in 1653. But the Remonstrants had long since begun a dialogue with Socinians, who had been making their way west, through Germany to the United Provinces, following the loss of their Polish retreats. Later the Remonstrants would welcome like-minded Huguenots such as Jean Le Clerc, as well as the doctrinally elusive English rebel, John Locke. Dutch Socinians, meanwhile, associated in communities known as Collegiants, and several of these were attracted by and even became followers of Spinoza.

A not dissimilar proliferation of heterodoxy occurred in England once the royal authority which had sustained the Church of England broke down under parliamentary opposition at the beginning of the 1640s. Here Arminianism, and even Socinianism, was detected among episcopalians; but try as they might, the Calvinists failed to persuade the parliamentary laity that theirs alone was true doctrine, despite—or because of—Scottish Presbyterian support. Instead the Parliamentarians sanctioned plural, 'Independent' churches, while trying (without much success) to agree on an interpretation of religious liberty whose limits the civil magistrate might effectively police. At the Restoration the supremacy of the Church of England was re-established, but Dissent proved ineradicable. Even a single orthodoxy as to the nature of the Church, whether true (Catholic and Apostolic) and therefore *iure divino*, or simply by law established, *iure civile*, was beyond agreement, and remained so after the further Revolutionary settlement of 1689.

In the Roman Catholic Church, at least, there was little scope for fragmentation, whatever the local political conditions. But heterodox Catholics could exploit the potential for division between the papacy and national churches. In France, the Jansenists of Port Royal survived because the crown and the Gallican Parlements refused to permit their suppression. Ironically, the survival of their heterodoxy was also facilitated by the sovereign power in Rome itself. The major reforming Popes of the

later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Innocent XI and Clement XI, invoked Augustinian ideals in their efforts to purge the Curia of corruption and nepotism. The Pope, of course, could not but be orthodox (the Councils which might have tested this being a thing of the past): the Augustinian-minded Innocent XI was free to remark to the French ambassador in 1681 that he was aware of no Jansenists in Rome. Thereby, he could, and in this instance did, sanction a certain room for manoeuvre.³¹

Heterodoxy was not only a doctrinal and political fact; it was also a social and cultural phenomenon. While ours is not the volume to pursue this line of enquiry, a few basic observations should be borne in mind. Some clergy were more likely to indulge in heterodoxy than others: the academic, especially those who were without ambition to climb the ladder of clerical preferment—or whose ambitions had been thwarted; the independently wealthy; those who enjoyed the protection of powerful patrons, ecclesiastical or lay. (A fortunate few, like the eighteenth-century Cambridge don, Conyers Middleton, fitted all these categories.) Laymen and women who inclined to heterodoxy would also require protection, or, often more effective, the support of a socially and politically close-knit community. The burghers of Amsterdam and other, smaller cities of Holland provided the Remonstrants with such a social base. Powerful patrons, such as the Duc de Luynes in France, provided a refuge for leading Port Royalistes, including Pascal. Again, however, it is worth underlining how much better equipped was the Counter-Reformation Catholic Church to combat communal dissent. For the common people there could be no grey area of heterodoxy; dissent was treated as heresy. Not only did the parochial and confraternal structures decreed by the Council of Trent and supervised by the bishops make communal autonomy difficult to sustain, other than in the remotest regions.³² The Inquisitorial insistence on the confession of names was expressly designed to expose the networks which, the Church well understood, were required to sustain a popular challenge to orthodoxy. Ordinary laity who indulged in heterodoxy on their own were curiosities whom inquisitors found hard to comprehend.

³¹ On the reform Papacy of Innocent XI, Bruno Neveu, 'Culture religieuse et aspirations réformistes à la cour d'Innocent XI', in idem, *Érudition et religion aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1994), 235–76, esp. 259–65.

³² For example, in the Alps: Regina Pörtner, *The Counter-Reformation in Central Europe: Styria 1580–1630* (Oxford, 2001); or in southern Italy, classic territory of the internal 'mission': Jennifer Selwyn, *A Paradise Inhabited by Devils. The Jesuits' Civilising Mission in Early Modern Naples* (Aldershot, 2005). See more generally Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, Part III.

The significance which has come to be attached to Menocchio, the wildly heterodox Friulian miller, as a result of Carlo Ginsburg's micro-historical study was lost on the Church at the time.³³

If heterodoxy was positively to flourish, it needed access to publication. The publishing history of heterodoxy is another dimension of the subject which remains under-studied; and it is a subordinate but not the central theme of this volume. Print had, of course, been vital to the success of the Reformation, and the Counter-Reformation Church had quickly recognised that this was what made modern, Lutheran and Reformed heresy so much more dangerous than any of its predecessors. In many smaller Protestant states the church and the civil magistrate combined to control publishing, with varying degrees of success. But the remarkable growth of London and Amsterdam in the seventeenth century facilitated the emergence within them of printing industries with multiple publishing houses, which tested and eventually broke their magistrates' will to control their activity. As a result, not only did English and Dutch heterodoxies gain ready access to print, but the two cities offered the possibility of publication to the heterodox throughout Protestant Europe, and even, where they were able and willing to supply copy, to Catholics as well.

Within Catholic Europe, however, the position was again very different. There was no doubting Rome's intention to control publishing and access to books. Immediately following its reconstitution in 1542, the Holy Office had extended its remit to include the censorship of books; encouraged by Paul IV, it drafted the first Roman Index of Prohibited Books in 1559. A second Index was drawn up by the Council of Trent and published in 1564; and in 1572 Pius IV established a separate Congregation of the Index, independent of the Holy Office. After a lengthy gestation, this duly produced a third Index, the 'Clementine Index' of 1596. Several more Indexes were published in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century; between their appearance, the Congregation issued lists of works to be added to the last-published Index. Offending works might be definitively 'prohibited' (*prohibetur*), or 'prohibited until corrected' (*prohibetur donec corrigatur*); correction was to take the form of 'expurgation', removing or erasing unacceptable passages. It is important to recognise what a remarkably ambitious project this was. Not only would the Church prohibit its members access to works deemed heretical or seriously erroneous, which

³³ Carlo Ginsburg, *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (London, 1980; translated from the Italian original of 1976).

meant all works of Protestant as well as many of Catholic theology; it also set itself to correct works which contained matter which might be useful to Catholics, but were tainted by passages deemed erroneous.³⁴

In this case, however, ambition had far exceeded the capacity for enforcement. In part this was because the Holy Office was determined to treat the Congregation of the Index as its subordinate. Not only did the Inquisition continue to involve itself in censorship, acting on its own initiative in the most serious cases, such as Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in 1678, or Giannone's *Storia civile del Regno di Napoli* in 1723. It also persistently blocked attempts by the Index to develop an enforcement machinery of its own. But in truth nowhere in the Church (except perhaps in Rome itself, where the Master of the Holy Palace had an existing responsibility for censorship) were there the resources required to ensure that prohibited books did not circulate, or that expurgation was effectively and consistently carried out. The latter in particular required the involvement of lay academics, whose scholarly and pedagogic interests might lead them to minimise the errors they corrected.³⁵ Outside Rome, in the two greatest cities in Catholic Europe, Paris and Naples (respectively the second and third cities of Europe, between London and Amsterdam), heterodox Catholic and even heretical, Protestant books were present in major collections and libraries, and quite freely available to educated readers. In Paris, moreover, there was sufficient competition among printers for work, and division between the various bodies responsible for censorship, for a determined heterodox author to get himself published at least once; after that, as first Pascal and his friends and later Richard Simon would demonstrate, there were the Protestant publishers of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. As an appeal to lay opinion, Pascal's *Lettres Provinciales*, collected and published by Elzevier in Amsterdam in 1657, were a runaway success, defying all attempts by the authorities in Paris and Rome to prevent their

³⁴ On the beginnings of the Index, Gigliola Fragnito (ed.), *Church, Censorship and Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, 2001), esp. the contribution by Fragnito, 'The central and peripheral organisation of censorship'; for its subsequent development, Elisa Rebellato, *La fabbrica dei divieti: gli Indici dei libri proibiti da Clemente VIII a Benedetto XIV* (Milan, 2008)—albeit this is primarily a bibliographic study of the composition of successive Indexes, rather than of the development of policy. Much more informative on the latter, but only beginning in the eighteenth century, is Patrizia Delpiano, *Il governo della lettura. Chiesa e libri nell'Italia del Settecento* (Bologna, 2007).

³⁵ See Fragnito, 'Central and peripheral organisation of censorship', and Rodolfo Savelli, 'The censoring of law books', in Fragnito (ed.), *Church, Censorship and Culture*, 13–49, 223–53.

circulation throughout Europe.³⁶ However well-equipped it was to combat heresy in its own territories, not even the Counter-Reformation Catholic Church could block the circulation of educated heterodoxy.

The case of the *Lettres Provinciales* may have been exceptional: no Italian author was allowed to break the bonds of censorship so completely. The first edition of Giannone's *Storia Civile* having been printed secretly in Naples in 1723, the prospect of a second, which he had hoped to arrange in Geneva in 1736, was enough to provoke his kidnap from the shore of Lac Lemman and imprisonment in Savoy fortresses for the rest of his life. At the same time, the Church made sure that it obtained the manuscript of his even more heterodox 'Triregno', thereby preventing its publication at all. Even so, copies of the first edition of the *Storia civile* remained widely available, while English Catholics and Swiss Protestants were responsible for translations respectively into English in 1729–31 and French in 1742.³⁷ In a confessionally divided Europe, published heterodoxy was a Roman Catholic as well as a Protestant phenomenon.

While the publishing history of heterodoxy is not neglected in this volume, however, the focus here is on elucidating the intellectual content of heterodox religious thinking, and tracing its consequences for other fields of enquiry. As we have noted, both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches turned to the laity to provide philosophical, jurisprudential and historical reinforcement for doctrinal positions. Not surprisingly, their contributions were liable to reshape the ways doctrine was understood; but just as important, we wish to argue, was the likelihood that

³⁶ Following first, fugitive publication in Paris as they were written, between January 1656 and May 1657, the *Lettres Provinciales* were published in one volume by Elzevier in May 1657, with two reprints in the same year. Elzevier then published a Latin translation (by Pierre Nicole) in 1658, and a new edition of the French, with corrections, in 1659. Further editions followed, along with Italian and Spanish translations. A 'polyglot', containing the French, Latin, Italian and Spanish versions, was published by Elzevier in 1684. Richard Simon had his works published by several Dutch houses, turning to Elzevier to publish the *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* in 1680 after the Paris edition of 1678 had been (in large part) confiscated; five years later a new edition based on the Paris original was published by Reinier Leers, who also published several other of Simon's works.

³⁷ Giannone recalled the clandestine printing of the *Storia civile* in his Autobiography: Pietro Giannone, *Vita scritta da lui medesimo* (c. 1741), ed. S. Bertelli, (Milan, 1960), 63–5; also 308ff on his hopes of a publishing a second edition in Geneva, the machinations of Rome, his deception and kidnap. On the translations: Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'Pietro Giannone and Great Britain', *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), 657–75, repr. in idem, *History and the Enlightenment* (London, 2010); Georges Bonnant, 'Pietro Giannone à Genève et la publication de ses oeuvres en Suisse aux xviii^e et xix^e siècles', *Annali della Scuola Speciale per gli Archivisti e i Bibliotecari dell'Università di Roma*, III, (1963), 119–38.

proponents of heterodox doctrine would seek to work out the implications of their heterodoxy for the other disciplines with which they were engaged. When, as we have seen, the existence and definition of heterodoxy involved the temporal as well as the spiritual power, the intellectual boundaries between revelation and the truths of this world could hardly be impermeable.

III

After the Reformation, the central intellectual problem was the relationship between nature and grace; efforts to define this relationship anew would have a lasting impact in both philosophy and theology. The medieval understanding of these two realms was challenged, by Protestants who offered a new interpretation, but also by Catholics who sought to rethink as well as to defend their philosophical heritage. In both cases, the consequences were significant, and form a key part of the intellectual background to the issues covered in this collection. Yet these consequences have never been fully explored, and so it is necessary to outline them briefly here, concentrating on those early modern scholars and theologians who undermined some of the fundamental assumptions of their medieval forebears. Not only did they separate more clearly the realm of grace from the natural world, extending the scope for the analysis of 'natural' moral and religious phenomena; they also began to historicise the revelation by which that grace was made known to human beings. While it was Protestants who instigated these developments, we will pay equal attention here to their treatment by Roman Catholics, whose contributions have been both under-studied and misinterpreted.

In the Middle Ages, scholars and theologians had distinguished the two realms of nature and grace, while insisting that grace fulfilled (and did not damage) nature. The operation of divine grace was covered by revelation, and was the subject of theology, including the interpretation of Holy Scripture. This interpretation would be guided and enforced by the church. Nature, however, was the realm of law, the subject of philosophy, natural and moral, and the province of temporal authority. Natural philosophy concerned itself with the explanation of natural phenomena, moral philosophy with the identification and elaboration of the norms which should govern the relations of humans with each other. Philosophers and theologians drew upon a range of sources in their efforts to understand both natural world and the nature of God, but chief among

their earthly authorities was Aristotle. This Scholastic Aristotelianism was most authoritatively stated by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, and then elaborated, with different emphases, by theologians and philosophers over the course of the following two centuries.

The Scholastic-Aristotelian philosophy had enabled scholars to examine both the natural world and the truths of revelation, while keeping these fields of enquiry separate from each other. Underpinning this philosophy was a well-developed theory of the attributes of God, now seen as triune, and of the operation of his power. His three essential attributes were perfect knowledge, power and will, *sapientia*, *potestas*, and *voluntas*. The operation of his power was itself two-fold, God exercising both a *potestas absoluta* and a *potestas ordinata*. The former was a power to do whatever he willed, while his 'ordinary power' was exercised regularly, according to rules which God himself established in his goodness and wisdom, and which might be apprehended by human reason. The distinction between these types of power stabilised the relation between the revealed and the natural, enabling the latter to be understood as the domain of regularity, governed by the divine *potestas ordinata*.³⁸ The doctrine of the Trinity gave this argument a distinctively Christian spin, for both Christ and the Holy Spirit were involved in all God's works and operations.

When Martin Luther turned the attention of Christians to the saving work of Christ as expressed in the New Testament, he began to put pressure on this scholastic vision. Luther insisted that human beings could only be saved through the gift of faith in Christ; their own works and endeavours could never be enough to please God. As the first defenders of Roman Catholicism were quick to point out, this seemed to devalue human morality, and to set the grace of God against all earthly or natural laws. Even if mainstream Protestants rejected the consequent charge of antinomianism, that they were denying obligation to any earthly or moral law, Anabaptists and other radicals quickly showed themselves anxious to put Christ's message of freedom and equality into practice, attacking the existing political and social hierarchy. They argued that Christ had revealed a new way of life, one in which social hierarchies would be transformed and in which Christians would be freed from their bondage to earthly powers. They explicitly invoked Christ's commands as a challenge

³⁸ For a fuller discussion, with further references, see Enrico Nuzzo, 'Between orthodoxy and heterodoxy in Italian culture in the early 1700s: Giambattista Vico and Paolo Mattia Doria', below, 215–218.

to the laws and norms of the natural and temporal world. Just how subversive such ideas could be, they showed in the German Peasants' War.³⁹

Protestant leaders did not want to abandon their focus on faith in Christ, but nor did they want to see earthly hierarchies destroyed. On the contrary, they were keen to use the existing temporal authorities to put their version of Christianity into practice. They began, therefore, to insist that the New Testament, and the coming of Christ, added nothing to the natural or moral law, on which earthly power was based. Here, mainstream Protestant theologians drew heavily on Scholastic and Aristotelian ideas, but they emphasised the perfection of the natural law more than ever, insisting that it contained all God's commands for a moral life. The gospel said nothing new about ethics or morality, they argued; instead it provided the means by which sins could be forgiven and human beings saved. And, in contrast to the Catholics, most Protestants even argued that both natural and divine law gave the magistrate authority over religion in his territory. Faced with radicals eager to separate the realms of nature and grace, magisterial Protestants tied the two more tightly together. Reformers and theologians ensured that both Christ and the New Testament were firmly ensconced within a broader, universal philosophical framework, in which natural law guided human morality and even underpinned the visible church.⁴⁰

For their part, Roman Catholics sought to maintain and even reinforce existing distinctions between the natural and the revealed, not least because this would protect the independence of their Church. The value of Scholastic Aristotelianism was endorsed by the Council of Trent, and then taken to new levels of sophistication by the Spanish theologians and philosophers of the 'Second Scholastic', led by Vitoria, De Soto and Suárez. In the process these Dominican and Jesuit theologians gradually elaborated a novel concept of 'pure nature', imposing a sharper distinction between nature and grace than that thought necessary by Aquinas.⁴¹ They were also innovative in their treatment of natural right and natural law,

³⁹ See the texts collected in M. G. Baylor (ed.) *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge, 1991).

⁴⁰ K. Bretschneider (ed.) *Philippi Melanthonis Opera quae supersunt omnia* (Halle, 1834–60) vol. xxi, pp. 711–20; 1011–13; J. Estes, 'The Role of Godly Magistrates in the Church: Melancthon as Luther's Interpreter and Collaborator' *Church History* 67 (1998), 463–83; idem., *Peace, order and the glory of God: secular authority and the church in the thought of Luther and Melancthon, 1518–1559* (Leiden, 2005).

⁴¹ Henri de Lubac, *Augustinisme et théologie moderne* (Paris, 1965), chs. v–vi, viii.

applying these concepts to discussion of the moral status of the newly-discovered peoples of the Spanish Americas, who had had no knowledge of Christ.⁴² Such was their confidence in the regularity of the natural world, indeed, that they adopted, long before it was taken over by Grotius, the supposition that the law of nature would obtain even were it allowed that God did not exist. The formula carried no implication of the autonomy of nature; quite the contrary, for salvation was not to be found in nature alone. Instead, it clarified the principle that the revealed and the natural were two distinct realms, which required to be understood in the different terms of theology and philosophy. Indeed, this distinction formed the theoretical basis for their defence of papal authority, based as it was on divine positive law rather than merely upon natural law.⁴³

In their different ways, both Protestants and Catholics thus sought to balance the natural and the revealed, but both would find their carefully constructed edifices difficult to uphold. It is our argument that the heterodoxies which emerged from amidst the competing orthodoxies of Reformation and Counter-Reformation contributed directly to de-stabilising both versions of this Scholastic-Aristotelian framework. The intense focus of heterodox writers on the teaching of Christ and the operation of grace threatened to sever completely the revealed from the natural; this acute danger prompted a broader re-evaluation of the relationship between the two among both Catholics and Protestants. Since the relations between religious heterodoxy and natural philosophy have been the subject of other recent volumes, we do not discuss them further here, although they form part of more than one of the contributions which follow. Instead, we draw attention briefly to some of the ways in which heterodoxy and, particularly, a renewed interest in the historicity of Christianity might affect contemporary understandings of the natural and the revealed. These developments were apparent both in relation to natural law and natural religion and in historical and textual criticism of the Bible, the source of revelation; together, they fostered new and discordant approaches to historical understanding of religion, and of Christianity in particular.

Most immediately vulnerable to heterodox ideas was the concept of natural law as a set of universal moral rules. For if the Christian was called

⁴² Annabel Brett, *Liberty, Right and Nature: Individual Rights in later Scholastic Thought* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁴³ H. Höpfl, *Jesuit political thought: the Society of Jesus and the state c. 1540–1630* (Cambridge, 2004), 350–66; B. Hamilton, *Political thought in sixteenth-century Spain: a study of the political ideas of Vitoria, De Soto, Suarez, and Molina* (Oxford, 1963), 69–97.

to live in accordance with a new dispensation, following a new set of commandments and supported by supernatural grace, did this not cast doubt on the sufficiency, and even the legitimacy, of the natural law? The Anabaptists and some of the radical Protestants argued along these lines, but the most compelling case was made by the Catholic Jansenists. Looking back to Augustine, they stressed the inadequacy of the grace given to Adam, at least for salvation, and the necessity of the special grace which comes from the Holy Spirit. The Jansenists associated with Port-Royal insisted that the Christian was utterly dependent on God's saving grace; moreover, he or she was bound to live this life in accordance with the strictest standards set by God, even though these were impossible for fallen men and women who lacked the gift of supernatural grace. On this understanding of the obligations of a Christian, natural law was virtually redundant. Such limited sociability as fallen, concupiscent men and women were capable of could result only from a self-interested, self-deceiving prudence, which enabled them unwittingly to meet each other's basic needs. To these Catholic Augustinians, the entire inheritance of Scholastic natural law, so cherished by their mortal enemies, the Jesuits, was not only misplaced intellectual effort; it encouraged a pernicious conception of human moral capacity. Instead the Port-Royal Jansenists and their allies found themselves aligned with the ancient, pagan moral philosophy of Epicurus, as based on a similarly disenchanted account of human behaviour as fundamentally self-interested. Where works of the two traditions, Augustinian and Epicurean, were able to circulate freely alongside each other, as they did in later seventeenth-century Naples, the consequences of Jansenist heterodoxy could be very fertile indeed.⁴⁴

Within the Protestant world, a similar argument developed, but one which in its most sophisticated form emphasised the revelation brought by Christ rather than the gift of grace or the work of the Holy Spirit. It can be traced to Faustus Socinus, who set Christianity against nature when he argued that it was through Christ's ministry here on earth that God offered to human beings the possibility of eternal life. He and his followers insisted on the great rewards which awaited those who obeyed the new commands set out by Christ, thereby undermining the natural law—and the law of the Old Testament—with their earthly rewards and punishments. In his theology, the advent of Christ was crucial, for it was

⁴⁴ For this argument, John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment. Scotland and Naples 1680–1760* (Cambridge, 2005), chs. 3, 5.

only through the teaching of Christ that men became aware of the true path to heaven, and came to see the limitations of all previous ethical systems. While this did not obviate the need for a minimum of natural law to govern purely earthly transactions, the scope of the latter was drastically reduced. Socinus posited a minimal set of natural 'rights' which individuals might use to contract one with another, but insisted that these had little or no political content, and excluded the natural right of resistance which radical Calvinists had sought (and fought) so hard to preserve.⁴⁵ Responding to the pressure which the Socinian communities in Poland came under in the early seventeenth century, the second generation of Socinians, led by Johan Crell, sought to enlarge the scope of natural law, the better to provide Christians with a measure of protection against hostile rulers; this brought Crell into a critical dialogue with Hugo Grotius, a dialogue which expanded to include the Remonstrants more generally. But others, notably English Royalists in the 1640s, continued to find the Socinian idea of minimal natural rights an attractive basis on which to argue a case for non-resistance to the civil power.⁴⁶ In these ways, Socinian heterodoxy played a key—if hitherto not well appreciated—role in shaping Protestant thinking about natural law, in particular by narrowing its focus to a minimal set of natural rights.

Socinus not only re-cast the relation between natural law and Christ's law. Because Socinus believed that Christ's work here on earth had fundamentally altered the relationship between God and human beings he also rejected any notion of the pre-existence of Christ, and roundly denounced the doctrine of the Trinity. In so doing, he placed Christianity firmly within human history, as an alternative to, rather than the fulfillment of, the natural order. Christianity was once more a local phenomenon, relevant to those who heard the message, and quite separate from the broader natural or human world. The Trinitarian position had been designed to elevate Christ from human history and to ensure that the Christian religion—and the God it proclaimed—stood above time, thereby preserving the integrity of the natural order and its role in the Christian scheme. Socinus,

⁴⁵ Sarah Mortimer, 'Human Liberty and Human Nature in the Works of Faustus Socinus and his Readers', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 70 (2009), 191–211.

⁴⁶ Hans Blom, 'Grotius and Socinianism', in Mulsow and Rohls, *Socinianism and Arminianism*, 121–48; and Sarah Mortimer, 'Human and divine justice in the works of Grotius and the Socinians', below, 75–94; idem, *Reason and Religion in the English Civil War. The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge, 2010) 26–33, 88–118.

and those who set a premium on the earthly ministry of Christ, sought to re-insert Christianity into history, emphasising its dramatic, even destructive, effect on the natural and human world.

This intrusion of history into theology was galling for orthodox Protestants. Although early modern Christians accepted that their religion had a past, most tended to play down its significance. God may have revealed himself in different ways to different people, but the revelation remained essentially the same. Indeed, if God's words and his works were to remain in harmony with the natural world, and the basis of the one true faith, then they needed to be consistent throughout time. The Old Testament announced the New and the latter was continuous with the former. But Socinus argued that Christ had in fact preached a new and hitherto unknown message, and he (and his followers) began to prise apart the Old and New Testaments. The effect was to decouple the New Testament from both the Old Testament and the natural order, emphasising the New Testament as the authentic and final revelation of God. Not only, therefore, did the Socinian heterodoxy reduce the scope and content of natural law; it suggested that religion itself might change, and be subject to history.

Socinus claimed to be faithful to the true message of the scriptures, rejecting Protestant interpretations of some of the most important verses. Here he joined the chorus of dissent which together undermined the Protestant conception of the Biblical text as clear and perspicuous to all, at least in matters necessary for salvation. His own position drew strength in the early seventeenth century from new research into Church history, and from a growing realisation that the central tenets of Protestantism, including justification by faith, original sin and the Trinity, had only been decisively settled by the Church in the Councils of the fourth and fifth centuries. Prior to this, many respected figures of the early Church had drawn different messages from the scriptural text. As the Protestants became aware of this historical problem they began to face an acute problem of defining orthodoxy in Biblical interpretation, of establishing a framework which would delimit an acceptable range of individual readings. Protestant clergy, especially as more of them came to possess a university education, naturally tended to assume that they possessed the necessary theological expertise to set such limits, limits which would protect and uphold the central tenets of Protestant Christianity. But it was unlikely that the doctrine of *sola scriptura* could ever be made to sit comfortably with the suggestion that interpretation should be subject to the authority of a church, or that churches might interpret the same scripture in different ways.

The problem of interpretation was compounded by another, even more fundamental. It was not clear that the text of the Bible itself—the very means by which revelation was made known—could bear the weight placed upon it by early modern Christians, Protestant or Roman Catholic. Questions over the stability of the Biblical text came to the fore at the start of the seventeenth century. As Noel Malcolm has demonstrated, the fundamental challenge to both Protestant and Catholic assumptions about the stability of the Biblical text came from Hebrew scholarship.⁴⁷ There were, in the first place, questions about the composition of the scriptural text: when and how the books of the Hebrew Bible were written, whether they had been revised, when and by whom, and when the canon of accepted books had been agreed. In particular, Hebrew scholars had recognised the difficulties in the traditional supposition that Moses had been the author of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible; at the very least, they suggested, these books had been revised by Ezra and the Great Synagogue, following the return of the Hebrews from their Babylonian captivity. Further questions surrounded the language in which the text had been written. Ancient Hebrew had been without signs for vowels, which had only been inserted, in the form of vowel points, by the Masoretes, Hebrew grammarians of the third to the tenth centuries. On linguistic as well as textual grounds, therefore, it was clear that the Hebrew Bible had been compiled over a lengthy period of time. This introduced the possibility of the alteration of the text, a possibility which sat ill with its status as divine revelation.

An alternative text of the Old Testament was the so-called Septuagint, a translation into Hellenistic Greek supposedly made in the third century from an earlier Hebrew version, and endorsed by Augustine. The Septuagint offered the potential advantage of a longer chronology, postulating some 5,400 years between the Creation and the birth of Christ, as opposed to the barely 4,000 years allowed by the Hebrew Bible. But the Septuagint raised textual problems of its own; moreover it could not resolve all the problems raised by the Biblical chronologies. As even the greatest of early modern chronologists, Joseph Scaliger, was forced to conclude, these simply could not be made consistent.⁴⁸

Many of the textual problems related chiefly to the Old Testament, but the New Testament was not immune. It became apparent that the Gos-

⁴⁷ Malcolm, 'Hobbes, Ezra and the Bible', *Aspects of Hobbes*, esp. 398–413.

⁴⁸ Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger. A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship*, two vols. (Oxford, 1983–93), *II Historical Chronology*, esp. 728–43.

pels had been written up some time after the events they described; and it was not clear that their authors were those traditionally identified. There had also been later additions to the text, as the marginalia, or *scholia*, of copyists became incorporated into its main body. The questions asked by textual criticism posed a serious challenge to both Protestant and Catholic theology and self-understanding. The challenge was exacerbated by the intervention, in the mid seventeenth century, of three *provocateurs*, Thomas Hobbes, Isaac La Peyrère and Benedict Spinoza, all of whom exploited the work of the scholars to reinterpret key propositions of revelation, and, in Spinoza's case, to question whether the Old Testament was divinely-inspired at all.⁴⁹ Even more critical than these interventions, however, was the failure of either Protestant or Catholic scholars to re-establish the integrity of scripture on terms acceptable to their respective churches. In this sphere too heterodoxy proved impossible to avoid, with the consequence that both Protestant and Catholic thinkers were obliged to confront the historicity of revelation and the practice of religion.

On the Protestant side, one line of biblical scholarship followed the Buxtorfs, father and son, in putting their faith in the Hebrew text, as established by the Massorettes. The 'providence of God', Johan Buxtorf argued, had ensured the absence of error in the Hebrew holy books. The basis for such confidence was effectively destroyed, however, by the ablest of the Protestant critics, Louis Cappel, whose *Critica sacra* (1650) was a demonstration that very little of the Masoretic Hebrew text could be relied upon. Even if Cappel believed that this was still enough to establish 'la religion', the Christian faith as the Reformed understood it, the certainty of the revealed text was sharply reduced.⁵⁰ An alternative approach, much favoured by English scholars (but not by Cappel), was to adopt the Septuagint instead of the Hebrew Bible. The cause of the Septuagint and its chronology was loudly championed by the Dutch scholar, Isaac Vossius, in a series of polemical tracts written between 1659 and 1663. But in the late 1680s a younger, Oxford scholar demonstrated that the Septuagint was neither as distinct from the Hebrew textual tradition nor as old as Vossius and others had supposed.⁵¹ Perhaps in frustration, Anglican scholars were

⁴⁹ Malcolm, 'Hobbes, Ezra and the Bible', 386–98.

⁵⁰ On Cappel, François Laplanche, *L'Écriture, le sacré et l'histoire: érudits et politiques protestants devant la Bible en France au XVII^e siècle* (Amsterdam and Maarssen, 1986), chs. iv–viii.

⁵¹ On all of this, see Scott Mandelbrote, 'Isaac Vossius and the Septuagint', in Eric Jorink and Dirk van Miert, *The Wonderful World of Isaac Vossius* (Leiden, forthcoming), and his 'English scholarship and the Greek Text of the Old Testament 1620–1720: the

by the end of the century moving away from the Bible to the Fathers, aligning the Church of England with Patristic 'tradition'.⁵²

Still less reassuring was the approach developed by the Grotius in the successive 'Annotations' to the Old and New testaments to which he devoted much of the latter period of his life. For Grotius interpreted the two Testaments within their own, and very different, historical contexts, playing down the theological connections between the two.⁵³ Further, he admitted only that the books of the Prophets had been divinely inspired, and denied that this was true of New Testament authors, explaining away the assertion in II Timothy 3:16 that all scripture is given by inspiration of God.⁵⁴ Instead he argued that the authors of the Gospels had relied on the God-given human qualities of memory and reason. Grotius may well have intended his approach to offer Protestants (and even Catholics) the possibility of interpretative consensus based on the application of individual reason and historical scholarship. But there was never any prospect that the Reformed churches, let alone the Roman Catholic, would adopt the approach as their own.

In principle, the Roman Catholic approach to the Bible was straightforward: authority and the tradition of the Church were the criteria for an orthodox interpretation of scripture. The appropriate authority clearly lay with the papacy, and the tradition of the Church was embodied in the teaching of the Fathers, above all in the great figures of Jerome and Augustine. But Rome too faced difficulties of its own making in the interpretation of scripture, as a result of the decisions of the Council of Trent. The fundamental decision of the Council was to endorse the fourth-century Vulgate Latin translation by Jerome as the version authorised for use in the Church. In choosing the Vulgate, the Council intended chiefly to bar Catholics from reading the Bible in modern vernacular translations,

impact of the Codex Alexandrinus', in Ariel Hessayon and Nicholas Keene (eds.), *Scripture and Scholarship in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2006), 74–93. Also Eric Jorink, '“Horrible and blasphemous”: Isaac La Peyrère, Isaac Vossius, and the emergence of radical Biblical criticism in the Dutch Republic', in Jitse van der Meer and Scott Mandelbrote (eds.), *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: up to 1700*, 2 vols (Leiden and Boston, 2008), 428–50.

⁵² Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity. The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 2009), 252–395: as the case Henry Dodwell illustrated, however, recourse to the Fathers was not a guarantee of orthodoxy either.

⁵³ H. Grotius, *Annotationes in libros Euangeliorum* (Amsterdam, 1641, 1646 and 1650); and *Hugonis Grotii annotata ad Vetus Testamentum* (Paris, 1644).

⁵⁴ H. Grotius, *Opera omnia theologica*, 3 vols (London, 1679), II, 992.

which it regarded as inlets of heresy. But the decision had two other consequences. One was to make the Catholic Bible acutely vulnerable to developments in Hebrew textual scholarship, since the credit attaching to Jerome's translation was based on his supposedly superior knowledge of the Hebrew language and ancient Hebrew custom. The second was to make it harder for Roman Catholics to have recourse to the Septuagint, and its alternative chronology.

The leading Catholic textual critic of the mid-seventeenth century was Jean Morin, a member of the Paris Oratory. Morin was deeply suspicious of Hebrew scholarship and of the Massoretes in particular. If the ancient Hebrew text of the Bible had come directly from God, he argued, the subsequent introduction of the vowel points had marked its wilful corruption by the Rabbis. Morin derived reinforcement on this point from Cappel, whose *Critica sacra* he helped to publish in Paris, so as to prevent its automatic condemnation in Rome as the work of a Protestant. But unlike Cappel Morin also vigorously championed the merits of the Septuagint, believing the Vulgate to have been compromised by the Hebrew from which it had been translated.

Later in the century, however, Morin's scholarship was overtaken by that of a successor member of the Paris Oratory, Richard Simon. In his knowledge of the relevant languages and his conception of criticism, Simon was the greatest of all seventeenth-century Biblical scholars: his successive 'critical histories' of the two testaments, the *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* (1678) and *Histoire Critique du Nouveau Testament* (1689) offered elegant, rational solutions to all the major textual and historical issues. He insisted that the undeniable problems relating to the composition of the text of the Old Testament did not affect its divine inspiration. The Pentateuch could not have been written in its entirety by Moses, but the scribes who had written it had done so at his and therefore at God's command. The same was true for the 'prophets' who had written the books following the Pentateuch. For these had been publicly appointed to do so, drawing upon the records kept in the archives of the Hebrew Republic; since that republic was under the direct sovereignty of God, their appointment had also been divine. When Ezra and his scribes had revised the texts and determined the Hebrew canon, this too had been on God's authorisation.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Richard Simon, *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* (edition of Amsterdam, 1685), Book I, chs. 1–8.

The problems raised by the languages of the Bible were equally capable of resolution. It was inevitable that the language in which the text of the Bible had come down to Christian scholars was not that in which it was written, since language itself was subject to development. (God had not given Adam his language, or the nations after Babel theirs; rather, Simon explained, liberally quoting Lucretius, he had given men the power to develop languages, using their reason.)⁵⁶ As for the problems posed by inconsistent chronologies, these were inherent in a text composed in the manner of the Hebrew Bible. The Biblical chronologies were indeed unreliable, and must be supplemented by those found in profane histories. Simon made no attempt to adjudicate on the respective merits of the Hebrew and Septuagint chronologies; rather, he implied that it was unnecessary to be tied to either.⁵⁷ Whether on the grounds of composition, of language, or of chronology, there was no reason to prefer one version of the Bible to another: there was no 'original' text to be recovered, and none of the versions in existence was uniquely authentic.⁵⁸

Simon was no less confident in resolving the problems of the New Testament text. That the Gospels had been written up later was to be expected: Christ had commanded the disciples, who were simple men, to preach, not to write. Only afterwards had the early Christians sought to record in writing what the disciples had said. What mattered was that a consensus had quickly emerged within the Church as to which texts were canonical, and what these contained. The divine inspiration of the New Testament was not only explicitly asserted—Simon sharply criticised Grotius for trying to explain away II Timothy 3:16; it was guaranteed by the authority and tradition of the earliest Christian Church. Critically understood, therefore, the texts of the Bible supported the fundamental position of the Roman Catholic Church, that their validity was a matter of authority and tradition. The Church should have nothing to fear from the criticism of Protestants, of Socinians, or of Spinoza.⁵⁹ Properly applied, criticism enhanced confidence in revelation as Catholicism understood it.

⁵⁶ Simon, *Vieux Testament*, Bk I, chs. 14–15.

⁵⁷ Simon, *Vieux Testament*, pp. 5, 38, 205–211.

⁵⁸ On this theme, Jacques Le Brun, 'Sens et portée du retour aux origines dans l'oeuvre de Richard Simon', *XVII^e Siècle*, 131, (1981), 185–98.

⁵⁹ Richard Simon, *Histoire Critique du Nouveau Testament* (Rotterdam, 1689), Préface, chs. 1–2, 23. Simon had anticipated his principal claims concerning the New Testament in the (unpaginated) 'Préface de l'Auteur' to the *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament*. On Simon's understanding of 'tradition', William McKane, *Selected Christian Hebraists* (Cambridge, 1989), 111–150.

Neither in Paris nor in Rome, however, were Simon's solutions acceptable. There were at least three insuperable obstacles to their reception. Simon had been much too indulgent of Hebrew scholarship, and had refused to condemn the Jews for systematic 'corruption' of the Biblical text.⁶⁰ (Morin's denunciations of the Rabbis were far more congenial to the authorities in Rome.) Further, Simon had made too many concessions to Spinoza and other heretics in his discussion of the authorship of the Pentateuch. In the face of all the evidence, the Church was determined to maintain Moses' sole authorship. Finally, and crucially, Simon had refused to treat the Vulgate, as endorsed by the Council of Trent, as the authoritative text of the Bible. He allowed only that the Council had been justified in nominating the Vulgate for exclusive use in the Church 'pour le bien de la paix', for the sake of peace; but he would not admit its exclusive authenticity.⁶¹ For these and other errors Simon was immediately expelled from the Oratory in 1678, and the Paris edition of the *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* was suppressed.⁶² Four years later the work was prohibited by the Congregation of the Index in Rome.⁶³ In placing Simon's works on the Index, the Roman Catholic Church set itself against the new criticism, falling back on papal authority and the tradition of the Church, embodied in the works of the Fathers. But (as we have seen) Simon was still able to publish freely, thanks to the Protestant printers of Amsterdam. Heterodoxy in relation to the text of the Bible, the very basis of Revelation, was as much, if not more, a feature of the Roman Catholic intellectual world as of the Protestant.

Heterodoxy thus not only recast the Protestant understanding of relation between natural law and Christ's teaching, and the Catholic account of the respective roles of natural law and the grace required for

⁶⁰ On Simon's interest in the Jews, Guy Stroumsa, 'Richard Simon: from philology to comparatism', *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*, 3 (2001), 89–107; repeated in idem, *A New Science. The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2010), 62–76.

⁶¹ The offending discussion of the Vulgate was in Bk II ch. 14 of the *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament*.

⁶² Patrick J. Lambe, 'Biblical criticism and censorship in Ancien Régime France: the case of Richard Simon', *Harvard Theological Review*, 78 (1985), 149–77; April G. Shelford, 'Of Sceptres and Censors: Biblical Interpretation and Censorship in Seventeenth-Century France', *French History*, 20 (2006), 161–81.

⁶³ Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede (ACDF), The Vatican, Index Diarii, Vol VII (1665–82), ff. 159–61: April, June, Dec. 1682; Index Protocolli RR, ff. 410–12: report of the Consultor, Laurentius Bulbul, who characterised Simon's 'temerity' in denying Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch as 'more Galilei'. Simon's condemnation led to that of Vossius: Mandelbrote, 'Vossius and the Septuagint'.

salvation; it also eroded the very textual basis of revelation, the integrity and universality of Holy Scripture. In both cases, as we have seen, it imposed a historical perspective. This was disturbing enough in its own right. But even more challenging were the implications of heterodoxy for the relation between the natural and the revealed within sacred history. Here too, a stable framework had once been envisaged. The Old Testament contained histories both natural and revealed. The primary history was the revealed, that of the Hebrews as a people chosen by God, whose prophets had anticipated the coming of the Messiah. But since the Old Testament also recorded the religion of peoples besides the Hebrews, and further showed that the Hebrews themselves had on occasion lapsed into idolatry, it clearly also permitted a natural history of religion, which might draw on the various ancient explanations for popular superstition as the product of fear, of imposture, or of the deification of great men (Euhemerism). Such a natural history of religion need not undermine revelation, for the Old Testament Hebrews, and indeed all of Fallen man, were covered by the operation of God's grace even before Christ made his sacrifice on the cross, through the doctrine of the Trinity. So understood, the Old Testament connected the natural and the revealed in one coherent account of sacred history, an account which reflected the delicate symbiosis of grace and nature.

Once Christ was held to have inaugurated a new covenant, as the Socinians and Remonstrants argued, this unity of the natural and the revealed in sacred history became more difficult to sustain. In particular, the validity of Old Testament religion as a means of achieving salvation was called into question. The path was then open to regard the Hebrews as but one among the several nations of the ancient near and middle east, little less idolatrous than, and quite possibly deriving their forms of worship from, others more developed and 'civilised', such as the Assyrians or Chaldeans and the Egyptians. As studies of these ancient religions multiplied in the later seventeenth century, there was a real risk that the natural history of religion would pull away from the revealed. An effective response, variously argued by the Protestant Samuel Bochart, the Catholic Pierre-Daniel Huet and the Anglican Edward Stillingfleet, was to reverse the direction of influence, and claim that the Hebrew religion was the origin of all other ancient religions, and even, as Huet would show in his *Demonstratio evangelica* (1679), that all the ancient religions included a counterpart to Moses. But it is important to recognise that those who questioned the distinctiveness and originality of the Hebrews did not necessarily mean to undermine revelation. When John Spencer demonstrated in *De Legibus*

Hebraeorum Ritualibus (1685) that the Hebrews derived their ritual laws from the Egyptians, he is more likely to have been emphasising the distance separating natural religion from what he saw as the true and unique revelation of Christ.⁶⁴ A few, among whom Herbert of Cherbury and John Toland are the usual suspects, may have wished to press the case for natural religion at the expense of Christianity, and in favour of a form of deism, as providing a basis for a common religion of mankind.⁶⁵ But it was not scepticism towards the Christian revelation which drove most of the enquiries into natural religion; it was the destabilisation, encouraged by heterodoxy, of the previously accepted understanding of the relation between nature and revelation in the Old Testament.

From the Catholic side, such research was driven by the need to incorporate into sacred history the religions of the recently 'discovered' peoples of the West and East Indies and of Asia. Since the concept of the mission to unbelievers was central to the Counter-Reformation (as it was not to the Reformation), it was Roman Catholics who faced the issues directly and gave them most thought, none more so than the Jesuits. Both the natural and the revealed dimensions of sacred history were involved. Natural monotheisms offered the prospect of leading their adherents up to the Christian revelation, just as Christ and the Apostles had sought to lead the Hebrews and the Gentiles of their day. But the presence of idolatry, so obvious in many cases to Christian eyes, raised difficulties for such a gradualist perspective, especially if idolatry was interpreted in Augustinian terms, as the work of the devil.⁶⁶ Just as serious were the difficulties of fitting the 'discovered' peoples into the timescale and the genealogies of revealed history: the chronology of the world since the Creation, and the genealogies of the nations after the Flood, as these were set out in the Old Testament. On the answers to both these sets of questions depended the

⁶⁴ Fausto Parente, 'Spencer, Maimonides, and the History of Religion', in Christopher Ligota and Jean-Louis Quantin (eds.), *History of Scholarship* (Oxford, 2006), 277–304, as against Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian. The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1997), pp. 55–79, who credits Spencer with 'Egyptianising' the Mosaic dispensation, and Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science*, pp. 95–100. But the suggestion canvassed by Parente that Spencer was a crypto-Socinian is supported by circumstantial evidence only.

⁶⁵ On these and other English contributions to the history of religion in this period, see the pioneering study by Peter Harrison, *Religion and 'Religions' in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1990).

⁶⁶ Joan-Pau Rubiés, 'Theology, ethnography, idolatry', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67 (2006), 237–80.

'orthodoxy' as well as the effectiveness of the missions, and of the different strategies adopted by the several participating orders.

In the case of the Americas, the Jesuit José de Acosta's *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (1590) had provided answers both elegant and enduring. There were different levels of barbarism, and hence of idolatry, through which all peoples could be expected to develop: at the highest level of 'true idolatry', already attained by the Mexica and the Inca, a strategy of de-paganisation should lead shortly to Christianisation. As for their place in sacred history, the Indians represented the farthest-flung of the offspring of Japhet, who had migrated across Asia, and thence via a northern land-bridge to the Americas; it was the sheer length of their migration, condemning them to a nomadic existence, which had reduced them to such depths of barbarism.⁶⁷

For both the Jesuits and their rivals, however, the really difficult case was that of the rather less barbarous China. Thanks to the quite extraordinary resilience and imaginative flexibility shown at its outset by Matteo Ricci and his companions, the Jesuit mission to China had successfully opened a dialogue with the mandarins and even with the Emperor; not surprisingly, the Jesuits' historical perspective was one of optimism. Confucianism they represented as a natural monotheism, protected from idolatry by the educated vigilance of the mandarins. Confucian ethics were those of natural law, interpreted by Ricci in a Stoic key. The ceremonies in which the mandarin 'letterati' engaged, including those in remembrance of ancestors, were purely 'civil'. In most key respects, therefore, Confucian beliefs were already close to those of Christianity: nature, in other words, could hardly have prepared the Chinese better for revelation. It was true, as the Jesuit Martinio Martini confirmed in his widely-read *Sinicae historiae decas prima* (1658), that the chronology of Chinese history was difficult to square with that found in the Book of Genesis, at least as that was given in the Vulgate. But the problem was solved if in this case it was permitted to adopt the alternative, longer chronology to be found in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament—permission for which the Jesuits had already anticipated the need in 1637. A further difficulty was the evidence of ancient Chinese histories that there had been emperors earlier than the Biblical date of the Flood, suggesting that the

⁶⁷ Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man. The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, 1986), Ch. 7, esp. pp. 168–79, 192–97. The 'fall' of the title is the outcome of nomadism: it was because they had travelled so much further after Babel that the 'natural' state of the American Indians was so much lower than that of the Chinese and Japanese, peoples who had only migrated across Asia.

Flood had not covered the entire earth, and that the Chinese might not be descended from the offspring of Noah. Again Jesuit ingenuity was equal to the challenge (if only, in part, by ignoring the most inconvenient evidence): a people whose natural religion was so close to Christianity were not to be thought to have a history incompatible with the history revealed in the Bible.⁶⁸

The Society's rivals, however, found such optimism facile. If they could no more admit Chinese claims to a chronology longer than that of the Bible, they could and did challenge the Jesuit interpretation of Confucianism as a pure natural religion. In their emphasis on Confucius' natural virtue, the Jesuits were forgetting the necessity of grace for salvation. They would portray Confucius as a natural saint: did this not entail, a Dominican asked, that he would have a natural paradise as his reward? It was likewise absurd to portray Confucian rituals as 'civil', when they were manifestly as idolatrous as those of the ancient pagans.⁶⁹ The Jesuit perspective, so the critics argued, reflected only too clearly a readiness to compromise the Christian revelation, to accommodate idolatry, and hence to defy Catholic orthodoxy. In the effort to re-work the relation between the natural and the revealed so as to bring the subjects of the missions within sacred history, it was the Jesuits, not their enemies the Catholic Augustinians, who were found to be heterodox.

The condemnation of the Jesuit understanding of Chinese rites in 1700 underlines how unstable the relation between nature and grace had become, on the Catholic side as on the Protestant. It was not that the Jesuits supposed the natural religion of the Chinese to have made revelation redundant, or that nature and grace could be disconnected.⁷⁰ But

⁶⁸ J.-P. Rubiés, 'The concept of cultural dialogue and the Jesuit method of accommodation: between idolatry and civilisation', *Archivum Historicum Societas Jesu*, 74, (2005), 237–79. See also Edwin J. Van Kley, 'Europe's "discovery" of China and the writing of world history', *American Historical Review*, 76 (1971), 358–63; D. E. Mungello, *Curious Land. Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Honolulu, 1989), pp. 106–33, on Martini.

⁶⁹ [Noël Alexandre, attrib.], *Conformité des cérémonies chinoises avec l'idolâtrie grecque et romaine. Pour servir de confirmation à l'Apologie des Dominicains Missionnaires de la Chine* (Cologne, 1700), esp. pp 73–4. The work was also published in Italian: *Conformità delle Cerimonie Cinesi colla Idolatria Greca, e Romana. In Conferma dell'Apologia de Domenicani Missionarij dell Cina* (Cologne, 1700).

⁷⁰ There is a mistaken tendency to suppose that the emergence of a natural historical approach to religion necessarily subverted the idea of revelation. Stroumsa, *A New Science*, pp. 11, 37–8, is an egregious example. A subtler statement, applied particularly to the Jesuit understanding of Asian religions, is offered by Rubiés, 'Theology, ethnography, idolatry'. A telling observation to the contrary is made by Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, p. 7: 'there is no natural or evolutionary way leading from the error of idolatry to the truth of monotheism. The truth can only come from outside, by way of revelation.'

confidence in a stable relationship between nature and grace had helped to define the connections between the universal moral law binding upon all people and the ethics of Christianity, and underpinned the optimistic assumption that natural religion culminated in Christianity. By the end of the seventeenth century, that confidence had been eroded. At the root of the problem lay the unavoidability of engagement with history. Sacred history was shaken in its foundations by biblical criticism, which exposed the uncertainty of the texts through which the (triune) God had revealed himself. There was now no prospect of settling the disputed chronologies of the Old Testament, while the relation between the Patriarchs and their Hebrew descendants and other ancient, pagan nations, Assyrian and Egyptian, Greek and Roman, Indian and Chinese, became an open historical question. For its part, the New Testament was no longer securely anchored in the Old. Appealing to the former, the Christocentric theology of radicals both Protestant and Catholic suggested that the natural law and natural religion to be found in the Old Testament were irrelevant, even worthless. Moving in reverse, Protestant deists like Toland suggested that Christ had very little to add to the efficacy of natural religion; without repudiating revelation, the Jesuits, meanwhile, had valued natural religion far above what fellow-Catholics could accept.

The consequences of these developments were twofold. On the one hand, they were an incentive to re-affirm clerical authority, especially to those willing to ground the church's authority unambiguously in Christ's revelation or in divine positive law. For many, the church seemed more necessary than ever, for it alone could control and authorise the interpretation of scripture. It could provide the unity which the Protestant churches, with their appeals to *sola scriptura*, would always lack. Moreover, if the church was understood as an entity quite distinct from corrupt and non-salvific natural religion, it could command the loyalty of its members that much more persuasively. Although Catholics were best placed to make use of these arguments, they were not unknown in the Protestant world. In England, High Church clerics began to insist after the Restoration that the authority of bishops came from their place in the Apostolic succession, eschewing any reliance upon temporal authority.

But there were other, less clerical, ways to resolve the issue: by re-thinking the relations between natural law and the Christian religion, and between the sacred, natural and civil histories of human societies. Moral perfection might still be conceived in terms of natural law, but the content of that law could be derived from human reason and experience rather

than from the Bible or innate ideas impressed upon us by God. One of the earliest and most provocative attempts to do this was made by Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes sought to demonstrate that the message of Christianity affirmed the true principles of natural law, themselves derived from reason and experience. To make his case, Hobbes needed to clear the space within sacred history for a civil science based on natural law, one unaffected by the advent of Christ—or any other divine revelation. He argued that he and his contemporaries lived in a time between the end of God's special rule over the Israelites and the restoration of God's kingdom at the second coming. In this period, he argued, human beings obeyed God by following the natural law. Hobbes understood the content of natural law in minimalist terms, akin to those of the Socinian-influenced Royalists who had reduced it to a set of rights alienable in return for peace. He was insistent that the civil society erected on this basis be understood non-historically; there was no question of natural law itself being subject to time. The time which mattered to Christians was sacred time, and in the third and fourth parts of his *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes capitalised on contemporary Biblical scholarship to offer a radical, richly heterodox interpretation of sacred history as set out in both the Old and the New Testaments. The importance of Christ and his commands was downplayed, so as to ensure that they could not trump, or even define, the laws of nature; for the purposes of salvation and a future life, Hobbes argued, what mattered was belief in Christ's second and final coming, not his first, brief life on earth.⁷¹ Understood thus, Hobbes' emphasis on natural law and natural right was not so much an effort to sidestep or undermine theology, as a powerful intervention in a contemporary debate over the true relationship between nature and grace.

Following on from *Leviathan*, and in many respects still worse in its implications, was Baruch Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670). Like Hobbes, Spinoza treated the Old Testament as a work of history, compiled after the first, Babylonian exile by the High Priest Ezra. Insofar as it revealed the Word of God, it had done so for a specific people, the Hebrews; it was Christ and his Apostles who had made the Word universal. But the revealed word of both Testaments was in any case no more than a moral teaching, of obedience and love of one's neighbour. It was this teaching which, when combined with natural law and philosophy,

⁷¹ Pocock, 'Time, History and Eschatology', 158–201.

provided the best guide to the divine and human worlds, which Spinoza understood as one and the same in nature. On the foundation of a monist metaphysics, Spinoza would solve the problem of reconciling nature and revelation in such a way as to re-write Christianity and destroy clerical authority; it is not surprising that his work, like Hobbes's, provoked outrage in both clerical and lay circles.

Outrage, however, was no impediment to publication in the relatively tolerant contexts of England and the United Provinces; and Hobbes and Spinoza made the most of their freedom. Roman Catholic thinkers were subject to tighter constraints—and needed to be correspondingly imaginative in overcoming them. Two of the most imaginative were the Neapolitans Giambattista Vico and Pietro Giannone. As we have seen, Inquisition and Index could not prevent the circulation in Naples of works of Protestant and Jansenist heterodoxy; as important, however, was the ingenuity shown by the two thinkers in circumventing Rome's hard-line insistence on its authority in matters of biblical interpretation and sacred history. In his *Scienza Nuova* (published in successive editions in 1725, 1730 and 1744), Vico's starting point was a strictly orthodox account of sacred history (and acceptance of Vulgate chronology); likewise orthodox, as Enrico Nuzzo will show, was his conception of divine providence as the expression of God's 'ordinary' power. But by his insistence that his new science was a 'rational *civil* history of divine providence', not a natural history, Vico sidestepped the need to reconcile the natural with the revealed. He was free to treat idolatry as a civil religious institution, and while he still used the term natural law to characterise the moral conditions of sociability, he explained it as the historically-acquired 'common sense' of nations—a form of custom. The operation of grace, meanwhile, was excluded from Vico's 'ideal eternal history' of nations: Christ makes only one appearance, while the early history of the Church is treated as an aspect of the 'return' to barbarism after the fall of Rome.⁷² The suggestion that Christ's message had changed the terms on which humans should live was discounted by Vico as effectively as ever it was by Hobbes and Spinoza.

⁷² The 1725 and 1744 editions of the *Scienza Nuova* are both printed in *Giambattista Vico: Opere*, ed. A. Battistini, 2 vols (Milan, 1990); and in English translation respectively as: *Vico: The First New Science*, ed. L. Pompa (Cambridge, 2002); and *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, ed. T. G. Bergin & M. H. Fisch (Ithaca and London, rev. ed., 1968). For the above points, see in particular Paragraphs 2, 43–4, 144–6, 310, 330–37, 342, 1047–56 of the Third (1744) *New Science*.

Giannone too made a point of writing 'civil' history. His first work, the explicitly-titled *Storia civile del Regno di Napoli* (1723), was not simply a critique of ecclesiastical usurpation of temporal power; it denied the church any privileged status as the subject of a separate 'sacred' history. Predictably persecuted for his temerity, Giannone responded by re-writing sacred history itself, in the 'Triregno' (composed between 1731 and 1733). The natural condition of man, he argued, was represented in the Old Testament: here was to be found the beginning of 'civil society'. Without a concept of the immortal soul, the ancient Hebrews had discounted the after-life and sought only worldly happiness; theirs was an 'earthly kingdom'. At the time of the second Temple, a version of the doctrine of the immortal soul derived from Greek philosophy had been adopted by the Pharisees; but these still conceived of the afterlife as a second earthly kingdom. When Christ preached the doctrine, however, it was to proclaim a heavenly kingdom, not one in this world. The New Testament represented the realm of grace, distinct from nature. Giannone underlined their separation in the third part of the work, where he argued that the church, the 'papal kingdom', was very definitely of this world. Its pretension to embody Christ's heavenly kingdom on earth was without sacred historical foundation: it was indeed the subject of civil history.⁷³

Like Vico, but also like Hobbes and Spinoza, Giannone re-conceptualised the relation between nature and grace by insisting on the 'civil' character of human institutions, and by excluding grace from civil history. The sphere of sacred history was thereby radically reduced, being confined to the past—and the future. In arguing thus, we suggest, all four of them were responding to the intellectual consequences of heterodoxy—to the de-stabilising of the previously settled relation between nature and grace, and to the unravelling of the integrity of the biblical text. It is our contention that their purposes can only be fully understood in this Christian, heterodox context: we shall not make sense of either Hobbes or Spinoza, Vico or Giannone, if their work is abstracted from this context, and prematurely secularized.

⁷³ Pietro Giannone, *Il Triregno*, ed. Alfredo Parente from the Naples Mss, (Bari, 1940), in 3 volumes: 'Del regno terreno', 'Del regno celeste', and 'Del regno papale'; and the outline of the work in Giannone's *Vita*, pp. 183–5, 199–207.

IV

In this opening essay, we have sought successively to indicate the purpose of this volume, to establish the place of 'heterodoxy' in the religious culture of early modern Europe, and, at greatest length, to set out what seem to us to have been the principal structural features of heterodox religious thought, along with some of their possible consequences. These structural features of heterodoxy, we have suggested, derived from the disruption of the Scholastic-Aristotelian equilibrium between nature and revelation, a disruption particularly evident in the treatment of natural law and the critical study of the Bible. The contributions which follow offer to deepen our understanding of several aspects of this picture, but cannot cover them all. There remains much to be done, but we hope that the volume will serve as a launch-pad and provocation to further enquiry and debate.

The two following essays, by Hans Blom and Sarah Mortimer, offer markedly different interpretations of Grotius's treatment of natural law and its relation to revelation. Blom addresses the tension between nature and revelation as reflected in the different conceptions of the relation between church and state held by the rival parties in the United Provinces. When revelation's place was assured, as the Calvinists assumed it to be, it was quite straightforward to understand the church and state as operating in separate spheres, and so to insulate the church from the state. What mattered to the Calvinists was that they should be able to exclude from the Church those who dissented from its definition of orthodoxy, not that all citizens should be included in its communion. The Calvinists, or Contra-Remonstrants, were therefore quite willing to see the state permit a measure of 'toleration' of heterodoxy outwith the Church. It was the Remonstrants, Blom argues, who reacted to their exclusion by seeking to develop a theology which would re-unite Protestant churches, and perhaps ultimately the whole of Christendom, around a common set of beliefs. In this sense it was the Remonstrants who were unhappy with the existence of 'heterodoxy', and wished to obviate the need for toleration. Blom suggests that this evolution of the debate was reflected in the thought of Grotius, in that his increasing commitment to a project for the unification of Christendom took him away from his more important earlier work on natural law. Then Grotius had sought a natural, non-religious foundation for civil life, an enterprise congruent with the mainstream of Dutch thought at the time; his later, irenical project reflected his

diminishing confidence that a separation between the natural and the revealed could be upheld.

By contrast, Mortimer's starting-point is Grotius's dialogue with Socinus and his followers. The Socinians had strong views about the nature of divine justice, which they insisted must be analogous to the justice of a human ruler here on earth. They argued that God must be able to forgive sins freely, just as human beings could. In elaborating their vision of Christianity without the doctrine of the atonement, they also began to discuss the ways in which justice and punishment might operate here on earth. In line with their conception of humans as free and reasonable agents, the Socinians suggested that humans might best be conceived as having a minimum of rights, with which they could enter into agreements with each other. In his very early work, Grotius had also thought in terms of a homology between divine and human justice, but one which was compatible with the atonement. Responding to Socinus, he sought to defend the doctrine of the atonement by a more distinct conception of the human community, naturally sociable, and possessing its own right to punish. This position, set out in the *De jure belli ac pacis*, was in turn answered by Johan Crell, leader of the second generation of Socinians, prompting further refinement of Grotius' position. The evolution of Grotius' thinking, in other words, was a direct intellectual consequence of engagement with Socinian heterodoxy, which prompted him to re-think the respective claims of nature and revelation.

The historic relation between church and state was rather different in England, neither Calvinists nor supporters of Episcopacy (positions themselves not necessarily antagonistic) being explicitly committed to the independence of the church before the Civil War. Once the war was over, however, the victorious parliamentarians searched desperately for a settlement which would satisfy their allies in the separatist, 'Independent' churches. In this context, Thomas Hobbes offered the most vehement statement of the case against independent ecclesiastical authorities. He did so, as Justin Champion shows, on the basis of a radical re-interpretation of both the natural and the sacred spheres. For Hobbes, claims to religious truth or authority were human claims, which ought not to be protected from philosophical scrutiny or, more important, the jurisdiction of the sovereign. Faith, on the other hand, was different, a matter for God and the individual. As grounded in nature, the sovereign's jurisdiction is absolute; as derived from sacred history, in the Old and the New Testaments, it is *jure divino*. Nature and revelation are in principle

congruent. But Champion also suggests that Hobbes's insistence on the natural foundation of religious belief in fear, and on the tendency of priests to manipulate belief to advance their own power, threatened to marginalise revealed truth. Anticipating Spinoza, Hobbes's naturalism comes close to questioning whether we need revelation.

The next two contributions represent a change of focus, towards the natural history of religion and its relations with natural philosophy. Martin Mulrow returns to the question of idolatry, a theme important to his earlier work, to show how sensitive an issue this remained for Robert Boyle as a Christian natural philosopher. Boyle's discussion of idolatry in his *Free Enquiry into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature* (first drafted in the 1660s) was, Mulrow argues, in part a response to his concern at the claims made for the charismatic healer Greatrakes by the naturalist philosopher-publicist Henry Stubbe. The repudiation of the Scholastic-Aristotelian understanding of nature made it vital to re-establish the line distinguishing revelation from nature.

William Poole, by contrast, explores the fascination shown by other members of the Royal Society, Isaac Vossius and Robert Hooke, for histories of China and the Chinese language. As Protestants, they were interested observers of the growing row within the Roman Catholic Church over the legitimacy of the Jesuits' 'accommodation' of Chinese history and chronology, and of Confucian natural religion. But as Poole shows, the case of China bore also directly on central concerns of the Society. One of these was the history of language, and the possibility of constructing a universal language which would replicate that ascribed to Adam. Another was the issue of whether modern learning represented a decline on ancient: Vossius used China to argue the case for the 'ancients', Hooke, in reply, for the 'moderns'. Hooke was a confidant of the heterodox Francis Lodwick, who urged upon him the findings of La Peyrère: here, as with Stubbe, heterodoxy was difficult to exclude from the natural history which was such a central preoccupation of the Royal Society.

A further pair of chapters return to the several currents of Protestant heterodoxy active in the United Provinces, but focus now on the later seventeenth century. In 'Lovers of Truth', Sami Savonius-Wroth identifies and explores a hitherto under-appreciated fissure between the cases for toleration made by Pierre Bayle and John Locke. In the early 1680s, Locke was at one with Bayle in arguing that man's disposition to love truth was incompatible with agreement to a single set of religious doctrines; differences must therefore be respected. This was their answer to the murderous persecutions of Huguenots in France and Dissenters in England; and

it distinguished them from Jurieu, who urged Huguenots to resist in the name of the absolute truth of the Reformed religion. During his exile in the United Provinces in the later 1680s, however, Locke was drawn to the theology of the Pajonistes, Huguenot Arminians whose leading theologian was Jean Le Clerc. As a result his conception of a 'lover of truth' underwent a subtle change, with far-reaching implications. Now Locke began to argue that the individual man (and to a certain extent woman) should be educated to seek truth, as a duty. Savonius-Wroth's conclusion in relation to Locke recalls Hans Blom's in relation to Grotius: in emphasising the need for individual human commitment to secure salvation, Arminian heterodoxy placed toleration below an active devotion to religious truth. As Savonius-Wroth also points out, however, the different implications of Bayle's disillusioned, Augustinian advocacy of tolerance of all dispositions may be thought equally problematic.

By contrast, Jonathan Israel's chapter takes up Sarah Mortimer's interest in the impact of Socinianism in the United Provinces. His starting-point is the split which developed within the 'Collegiants' of Holland when they encountered the philosophy of Spinoza. The Collegiants, several of whom were anti-Trinitarian, were precisely one of those groups of the heterodox which the Dutch state of the seventeenth century was willing to tolerate. As Israel shows, Spinoza provided a powerful account of both the Biblical texts and the natural world, which could be combined with some of the central tenets of Socinian theology, notably its emphasis on human reason in the interpretation of scripture, and its openness to a materialist conception of nature. A number of Collegiants were thus drawn into a tactical and philosophical alliance with Spinozism. Israel emphasises that the Collegiant Socinian-Spinozists viewed their position as a creed, not simply as a philosophy: this was a Christian heterodoxy, not philosophic atheism. The same creed, he argues, characterised English Unitarianism of the later eighteenth century, whose leading exponent, Joseph Priestley, was both a 'Socinian' and a philosophic materialist. Israel thus identifies in Socinianism a heterodoxy which had intellectual consequences reaching into the later Enlightenment. Insofar as this analysis forms part of Israel's larger, master narrative of the triumph of materialism, his contribution may be thought to cut across the editorial direction of this volume; but Israel's argument has always been richer than most of its readers have tended to assume, and his contribution here engages directly with the volume's central theme.

Enrico Nuzzo's discussion of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in the thought of two Neapolitans, Giambattista Vico and Paolo Mattia Doria, stands

out as a contribution to study of the subject in the Catholic world of the period. There was no 'toleration' of heterodoxy in Naples: neither philosopher could afford to identify himself with heterodox doctrine if he wished to be free to publish. Nevertheless, as Nuzzo observes, Doria was increasingly prepared to take that risk in the later part of his life, when he deployed the example of the Confucian mandarins to outline a natural religious critique of the excesses of contemporary Catholicism. It is in the case of Vico, however, that the relation between orthodoxy and heterodoxy is seen at its most complex. One of the leading contemporary Italian scholars of Vico, Nuzzo demonstrates that Vico gave his philosophy of history a crucial orthodox dimension through his account of the qualities of God and the operation of divine power. In line with Scholastic principle, Vico distinguished clearly between the *potestas absoluta*, governing the realm of grace, and the *potestas ordinata*, which governed the exercise of divine providence in human history. The care with which Vico drew this distinction, Nuzzo suggests, reflects the importance which the Church continued to attach to it; it also belies the interpretation, favoured by a number of scholars (especially in the Anglophone world), of Vico's concept of providence as a cover for naturalism, and even Spinozist materialism. Nuzzo's point, however, is that orthodoxy in relation to the divine powers created space for heterodoxy in Vico's treatment of human history. This is evident not simply in the Augustinian and Epicurean echoes in his concept of human nature. Far bolder was the move by which Vico re-shaped the relation between the natural and the revealed, by offering a 'new science' of human history on principles quite different from those governing the natural world. In an important sense Vico had secured the realm of grace in order to be able to set it aside—Christ is barely mentioned in the *Scienza Nuova*—the better then to reconstruct human history, including the history of sociability and of religion, as 'civil' history, not 'natural' history.

In the Protestant world of the early eighteenth century, meanwhile, radical heterodoxy could be more freely applied to sacred history. (As we have noticed, it was also being applied in the Catholic world, by Vico's Neapolitan contemporary, Giannone—but Giannone was not free to publish the results.) Conyers Middleton, the leading English sacred historian of his day, was so iconoclastic he has usually been taken for a Deist: Brian Young argues, however, that he was a Christian of a recognisably heterodox Anglican cast. His commitment was to an account of the Gospel message which was close to the natural religion of the pagan philosophers, and free of the accretions of pagan—and Roman Catholic—superstition. For

Middleton, in other words, the strength of the Christian revelation lay precisely in its closeness to natural religion. On this basis Middleton re-wrote the early history of the Church in Christian-Ciceronian terms, repudiating the post-Gospel miracles and neo-Platonist philosophical embellishments such as the doctrine of the Trinity. This, rather than Deism, was why he repeatedly ran foul of the Anglican hierarchy, for whom orthodoxy was now identified with Patristic tradition and in particular, at least in Cambridge, with the Trinity.

The dangers of the natural history of religion for orthodoxy were even more sharply exposed by Bolingbroke (who has a better claim to be called a Deist) and by David Hume (a professed unbeliever, but not an atheist). As Richard Serjeantson shows, however, the grounds for Hume's 'Natural History of Religion' can be traced back to the late seventeenth-century development of what had been the orthodox Eusebian tradition in the writing of sacred history. When scholars such as Marsham and Spencer studied the religious practices of the Israelites, and related them to Egyptian and Syrian cults, they loosed the Jewish religion from its mooring in revelation. At the same time, they were suggesting that religious practices were transmitted from one society to another, and were not the spontaneous expressions of a universal human religious sentiment. They may have meant to isolate and thereby secure the Christian revelation, but it was also possible to infer that Christianity was simply another historical form of religious practice, with no transcendent justification. Whence Hume, for whom all religions were explicable as expressions of human needs and human idiosyncrasies: it was the very naturalness of religion which ensured its diversity, as it developed alongside other human practices. Revelation, however that might be understood, was, he implied, causally redundant. There could be no sacred history distinct from profane.

Hume's natural history of religion may be regarded as the most radical of the intellectual consequences of heterodoxy considered in this volume. But Hume's unbelief is a contingent, not a necessary conclusion to the volume, the product simply of a chronological ordering of the contributions. It does not mean that heterodoxy itself had been displaced. If anything, Hume had stepped outside of the discussions with which this volume has been concerned. It is true that his 'Natural History of Religion' provoked the orthodox—being immediately denounced by Bishop Warburton and his side-kick Richard Hurd. But it is worth noticing that a far stronger reaction was aroused, twenty years later, by Edward Gibbon, when in Chapter Fifteen of the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* he engaged directly with sacred history at its most delicate point, the early

history of Christianity. Not only did Gibbon address sacred history, he did so acknowledging that revelation was the primary cause of Christianity's success, claiming only to supplement that explanation with a series of secondary causes. Yet it was precisely this that caused offence. Hume had stepped out of sacred history; Gibbon waded back in to it.⁷⁴ In so doing he re-opened all the difficult questions facing orthodoxy, not excluding the validity and credibility of the holy texts themselves. He had re-entered what this volume has suggested was the more important debate of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that concerning the relation between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, between nature, revelation and history.

⁷⁴ On this theme, see the most recent volume of John Pocock's great study of Gibbon: *Barbarism and Religion V: Religion: the First Triumph* (Cambridge, 2010).

STYLES OF HETERODOXY AND INTELLECTUAL ACHIEVEMENT: GROTIUS AND ARMINIANISM¹

Hans W. Blom

Introduction

Heterodoxy is, taken in its barest essence, the presence of different religious doctrines in some way of juxtaposition or co-existence, in situations where one would normally expect such variation to be absent. Where 'orthodox' denotes 'right' dogma, 'heterodox' is religious dogma that differs from the 'right' one. We do not normally call single church members 'heterodox' for disagreeing on dogmatic issues, unless these members start practicing what they preach, or rather start preaching what they believe. So it is the organisational manifestation of disagreements that calls for the determination of 'heterodoxy'. More specifically, heterodoxy requires some kind of denominational tension: organising religious meetings outside the reach of the church authorities, like the 'hagenpreken' (hedge-preaching) of the years under the cross of the Dutch reformed church, or the 'conventicles' and 'colleges' by members of the Reformed church in Rotterdam and elsewhere during the seventeenth century. One would not speak of heterodoxy in the case of a separate church organisation, like that of the Mennonites, Lutherans or Catholics, let alone the Jewish religion, because in themselves these churches are orthodox, they follow the right dogma. That is not to exclude the possibility of heterodoxy within these religions: the Mennonites were noted for their disagreements and are, therefore, throughout the seventeenth century distinguished into a great variety of sub-groups: the Vlamingen, Friezen, Mennisten. Once any particular church split, however, the term 'heterodoxy' was no longer relevant. Instead there was an absence of orthodoxy, or pluralism.²

¹ I am greatly indebted to discussion with Sarah Mortimer, during the conference and after.

² See now on Dutch church history: Joris van Eijnatten & Fred van Lieburg, *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis*, 2nd rev. edn (Hilversum, 2006); also Willem Frijhoff, *Embodied belief. Ten essays on religious culture in Dutch history* (Hilversum, 2002); Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century: the Golden Age* (Cambridge, 2005).

It is important to make these distinctions because—apart from variation in the nature of disagreements—the reaction to disagreement can differ also. In a mono-religious state, the standard reaction to the appearance of disagreement is an attempt to accommodate and/or to repress.³ Dissenters are either comprehended or tolerated, and if not they are isolated and destroyed. In a mono-religious state, as a rule different religions are not accepted, so the outcome of disagreements that takes the form of the establishment of different churches supposedly does not take place.⁴ One may ask whether it is prudent to try to maintain a mono-religious system, given the repression costs, or the difficulty of keeping everybody happy at the same time. But things certainly are different in states where religious pluralism is the norm rather than the exception. In pluralistic systems, the ‘exit-strategy’, in which dissenters leave the existing church and create their own, is a real one. Consequently heterodoxy can be present, but only in disguise: that is, one can infer from the growth in the number of different denominations that there is growing dissension in the existing churches. Alternatively, a ‘voice-strategy’, in which dissenters make their objections clear from within the church, can lead to a real fight about the ‘right’ dogma.⁵ A good example of the former is the denominational situation in the fishing village of Urk in the present Netherlands where there are more than 16 different reformed denominations. Yet even this number was not enough diversity for the inhabitants of Urk and many of them migrated to Michigan, where they set up new churches.⁶ The standard example of the latter, the ‘voice-strategy’, is the conflict between Arminians and Gomarists (or Remonstrants versus Contra-Remonstrants) that ended in the expulsion of the former during the Synod of Dordt (1618–9). Yet, given the consistorial organisation of the Dutch reformed church, where the autonomy of the local church was important, heterodoxy could be profiled in many different ways. The categorisation of disagreements on the spectrum from brotherly dispute to possibly heretical heterodoxy

³ For the process in which the term ‘heterodoxy’ became connected to *institutionally* divergent positions, see John Brooke and Ian Maclean (eds.), *Heterodoxy in early modern science and religion* (Oxford, 2005), xviii–xx.

⁴ Martin I. J. Griffin, Jr, *Latitudinarianism in the seventeenth-century Church of England* (Leiden, 1992).

⁵ For the classical definition of voice and exit strategies: Albert O. Hirschmann, *Exit, voice and loyalty. Responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states* (Cambridge, MA, 1970).

⁶ The traditionalist protestant daily newspaper *Reformatorisch Dagblad* writes on 17 February 2005: “Gereformeerde kerk in Urk gescheurd”: “Schism in the Gereformeerde kerk”, ‘a sad happening’ according to one of the ministers involved.

allowed for more inventive political latitude on a local level, even while its actual appearance was considered dangerous because normally accompanied by zealous enthusiasm. All governments—local and provincial—had a keen eye on such issues, issues in which as Christians they might also be involved.⁷

As this last paragraph suggests, the religious situation in the Dutch republic was unusual, and we may assume that it affected—and reflected—the ideas and intellectual achievements of its citizens. Here, I shall argue that the prevailing religious diversity encouraged some—but not all—theologians to focus their energies on what they saw as the one true church, and to allow dissent outside that church. Moreover, at least some Dutch scholars were able to sidestep religious controversies and turn their attention to other, more earthly matters. Yet even these men found it difficult to escape theological controversy entirely; even the great Hugo Grotius returned to biblical scholarship during his later years, as we shall see. The Dutch Republic was unique because it provided the space in which a variety of theologies, and even secular philosophies, could develop, but its people did not always take advantage of that space for unhampered intellectual pursuits.

A number of questions arise at this point: Was the religious pluralism of the Dutch Republic conducive to intellectual achievement? Alternatively, was intellectual curiosity more often than not connected to religious curiosity and independence? If we were to put these questions to Harold Cook, his answer would emphatically be: not religion, not heterodoxy, not curiosity. It's the economy, stupid. Cook points to interests, passions, and the collection of empirical data concerning those interests and passions as the motor of Dutch scholarship; for him, useful knowledge is the crucial 'pull factor' in scholarly achievement. Against such a view, a 'push factor' explanation would point to the liberating effects of heterodoxy upon the human mind which, unrestrained by religious fetters, could develop in any possible direction. The latter explanation would point to the many-faceted effects of religious pluralism in stimulating international (intellectual) exchange, educational self-support and a distinct cultural identity; and, one may add, distinct possibilities for economic networking along and across denominational lines. And indeed, we will see that economic

⁷ See the synoptic remarks on the variety in orientation of Holland cities—from Calvinist to Arminian to pluralistic—in the last chapter of Christine Kooi, *Liberty and religion: church and state in Leiden's Reformation, 1572–1620* (Leiden, 2000).

motives for religious pluralism played an important role in opening up an individualising tendency in the understanding of human variety, in concepts like 'self-interest', 'consumer autonomy', religious and other 'types of conscience', 'subjective rights', 'property'.

In this chapter, I will discuss the questions sketched out above in the following way. First, I will detail somewhat further the picture of Dutch religious life that I presented above. Then, I will examine one of the architects of the great reformed divide: Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), who himself was certainly an 'intellectual achiever', in order to see to what extent the later historiography may have distorted his heroic fight for tolerance. In the conclusion, I will suggest that the most important contribution religion made to intellectual achievement was its relative unimportance in the pursuit of intellectual ambitions.

*Religion in Dutch seventeenth-century society:
sects, solitaries and supporters*

In the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century, 'heterodoxy' has mostly only implicit or metaphorical use, precisely because religious diversity pre-empted its appearance. Moreover, the actual occurrence of heterodoxy was often motivated, at least in part, by prudential and political reasons. Writing on this topic from a Dutch perspective, and presumably the Netherlands of the seventeenth century represents a paradigmatic case of heterodoxy and intellectual achievement, it is striking that the very term 'heterodoxy' is so seldom used in the sources. A good example is the very title of the important study of Leszek Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans Église: la conscience religieuse et le bien confessionnel au XVII^e siècle*.⁸ His discussion of Mennonites, Collegiants, Labadists, followers of Leenhoff, Spinozists, and more, emphasises the absence of religious and confessional order. Kolakowski's beloved seventeenth-century Dutch Christians were 'without church' and they lived on the threshold between religious conscience and confessional aspiration. We should hesitate to call these Christians 'dissenters' or 'heterodox', precisely because they operated outside of a dogmatic order.

Even within the public church of the Netherlands, control over religious matters was extremely decentralised, allowing local churches extensive

⁸ Leszek Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans Église: la conscience religieuse et le bien confessionnel au XVII^e siècle* (Paris, 1969).

autonomy to negotiate doctrine with their members. A prime example of this would be the case of Dirck Coornhert (1522–1590), who throughout his life defended his right to take exception to confessional doctrine if his conscience told him so.⁹ His famous fights with the ministers and city governments of Delft, Haarlem and Leiden were (among other things) over his refusal to accept all the articles of the Heidelberg Catechism. That is to say, even within the church, doctrine was precarious. This is confirmed by the prudent practices that surrounded such internal disagreement: endless ‘conferences’ were conducted, with the assistance of wise men from outside the local church, in order to discuss the ‘gravamen’, the conscientious disagreement, and to arrive at some *communis opinio*. The traces of these mediations run through the synodal acta, and have their place in the *Kerckelycke Geschiedenissen* that Jacobus Trigland (1583–1654) was commissioned to write later in the seventeenth century.¹⁰

As a general characterisation of religion in the Dutch Republic, the subtle play between ‘voice’ and ‘exit’ on the part of the ‘conscientious objectors’—from Dirck Coornhert to other dissenting ministers like Cornelis Wiggerts (1560–1624) of the city of Hoorn, and beyond—made necessarily for responsive and deliberative church government. This took place in the absence of, on the one hand, a strong and authoritative declaration of

⁹ See e.g. his *Verclaringhe vande uyterlijke ende innerlijke Religie. Ende hoe dat alle de Ceremonien, 'tzy van God of de menschen, ingestelt, den mensche sonder de Liefde nyet salich maken en kunnen* (Gouda: Jasper Tournay, 1612) reprinted on the occasion of the religious quarrels of the moment. Coornhert argues here that the true religion is spiritual and mental, and that therefore ceremonies are not sufficient to salvation. If this is correct, then the distinguishing characteristic of institutional religion is dismantled. On Coornhert see Henk Bongers, *The life and work of Dirck Volkertszoon Coornhert*, ed. and tr. by G. Voogt, (Amsterdam, 2004); Marianne Roobol has meticulously analysed these religious disputes, and thereby shown that the identification of Coornhert with toleration—on the grounds of his conflict with the *politique* position of Justus Lipsius—is at least one-sided and most likely misleading; see Marianne Roobol, *Landszaken. De godsdienstgesprekken tussen gereformeerde predikanten en D.V. Coornhert onder leiding van de Staten van Holland (1677–1683)*, (Amsterdam, 2005).

¹⁰ See the final ‘report’ on Wiggers: *Oordeel ende Censure . . . Francisci Iunij, Lucea Trelcatij, ende Francisci Gomari . . . Ieremiea Bastingij, ende Iohannis Wtenbogaerts . . . over de doolingen van Cornelis Wiggersz . . .* (Delft, 1612), pamphlet number 1990 in W. P. C. Knuttel, *Catalogus van de pamfletten-verzameling berustende in de Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 1486–1853*, 8 vols. (The Hague, 1889–1940): hereafter in the form: Knuttel 1990; see also Jacobus Triglandius, *Kerckelycke geschiedenissen, begrypende de swaere en bekommerlijke geschillen, in de Vereenigde Nederlanden voor-gevallen, met derselver beslissinge, ende aenmerkingen op de kerckelycke historie van Johannes VVtenbogaert. : Uyt autentieke stukken getrouwelyck vergadert, ende op begeerte der Zuyd en Noort-Hollantsche synoden uytgegeven, tot nodige onderrichtinge*. (Amsterdam: Adriaen Wyngaerden, 1650). The latter book answered the Arminian history of the church troubles by Wtenbogaert, published three years earlier.

doctrine in the church and, on the other, any obligation to belong to that public church. Indeed, although the Dutch reformed church was congregational, and was virtually autonomous on the level of the parish, a structure of classis and synod had been introduced to provide guidance at the level of the city, the province, and (as became dramatically clear at the general synod of Dordt in 1618–9) at the level of the generality, i.e. that of all provinces taken together (the United Provinces). At the same time, the reformed church was only the ‘dominant’ or ‘public’ church (*de heersende kerk, de publieke kerk*), not the state church, established church, nor the embodiment of the state religion. As a community of the saints, the Dutch reformed church had always preferred true religiosity to attendance, and had made the former a prerequisite for the latter (as far as the Lord’s Supper was concerned, at least). The relatively small numbers of church members were thus mainly of the church’s own doing.¹¹

Although charges of heterodoxy were quite rare in the Dutch republic, there was some concern about the growth of sects and sectarianism. Traditionally in Christianity, heterodoxy was described in terms of sects, following here Jewish practice of describing the early Christians as sects. In other words, doctrinal deviations were tied to persons, causes, or congregations. Sectarianism was considered a breach of unity, as Martin Luther himself recognised in his famous “Hier stehe ich, ich kann nicht anders. Gott helfe mir”, allegedly spoken at the Diet of Worms on 17 April, 1521. These words express an acknowledgement of the principle of unity, but Luther claimed to have found in conscience and the ultimate authority of revelation a point of reference to withstand unjustified pressure towards such unity. An extensive literature on sects accompanies the Reformation, as for example in a pamphlet from around 1535 by Georg Witzel, *Apologia, das ist eine Verteidigungs-Rede Georgii Wicelii wider seine Afterreder, die Lutheristen, samt Abkonterfeigung lutherischer Secten*.¹² Indeed, a small industry of pamphlets against ‘Sekten und Rotten’—sects and flocks—would follow, directed not only against the Lutherans, but also against the Baptists. In 1545 Luther and a year later Calvin also began to discuss the existence of sects in their writings.¹³ By this time, the Anabaptists and the

¹¹ See van Eijnatten & van Lieburg, *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis*, 108ff, on church membership.

¹² *Flugschriften des 16. Jahrhunderts*, 4588.

¹³ Cf. *Flugschriften* 2084 and 851: Martin Luther, *De sectis et offenculis in ecclesia* (Hanover: Henning Rüdern, 1545) and Jean Calvin, *Brevis instructio muniendis fidelibus adversus errores sectae Anabaptistarum Adversus fanaticam et furiosam sectam Libertinorum, qui se Spirituales vocant* (Straßburg: Wendelin Rihel, 1546).

Schwenckveldians were criticised in what would become a basic principle of denominational strategy: ward off the allegation of sectarianism by laying it at someone else's door.¹⁴ In that way, each denomination could deny that it was responsible for bringing division into Christendom. As this suggests, sectarianism tended to be denounced by those most committed to the unity of the Church.

Sectarianism was a phenomenon common to Europe after the Reformation, but it is important to consider more exactly what the term represented in the Dutch case. As we have seen, it was used in the early Reformation, first by Catholics against the Reformers, then by the latter against the Anabaptists and Mystics. The occurrence of the term then slows down in the Dutch pamphlets. It is true that as part of much needed religious education the differences between the Calvinists and the Lutherans, Anabaptists and Catholics were presented with some emphasis. The last three were described as sects now and then, but since the Calvinists made no strong claim to exclusiveness, they tended not to denounce their opponents primarily as sectarians. Indeed, their objections to the other denominations were of a rather different kind. Already Dirck Coornhert had strongly distinguished heretics and sectarians, in the appendix to his *Proces van 't ketterdooden* (1590).¹⁵ Catholics continued to live in the Netherlands, and as Willem Frijhoff has argued, part of the Calvinist enterprise was to overcome a certain Catholicism in the outlook of the ordinary citizen, like belief in miracles, and the practice of Catholic rites and rules.¹⁶ At times the Catholic threat became entangled with this enterprise, and at such moments the Calvinists sought anxiously to distance themselves from the Catholics, fearing that some of their fellow Protestants might in fact be seeking to re-introduce Catholic practices.

A classical treatise on sects is that by Caspar Grevinckhovius (1555–1606), published in 1611, after his death, under circumstances which remain unclear.¹⁷ Here we still find the equation of heresy with sectarianism. That

¹⁴ See H. W. Erbkam, *Geschichte der protestantischen Sekten im Zeitalter der Reformation* (Hamburg, 1848), on mysticism and Anabaptists exclusively; Eric Voegelin, *Das Volk Gottes: Sektenbewegungen und der Geist der Moderne* (München, 1994); R. I. Moore, *The origins of European dissent* (Oxford, 1985; 1st ed. London, 1977).

¹⁵ See Dieryck Volckertsz. *Coornherts Wercken*. 3 vols (Amsterdam: Jacob Aertsz Colom, 1630), II, fol 101r.

¹⁶ Willem Frijhoff, *Embodied belief. Ten essays on religious culture in Dutch history* (Hilversum, 2002), esp. chapter 2, 'The threshold of toleration. Interconfessional conviviality in Holland during the early modern period', 39ff.

¹⁷ See Sara Brooks, 'The Discrediting of Caspar Grevinckhovius: Publication of the *Vande Vryheydt der Secten*', paper presented at the Princeton Renaissance Studies Conference, May 4–5, 2007; Caspar Grevinckhoven, *Van de vryheydt der secten, hoe schadelijck deselve zij*.

is no longer the case in the analysis by Simon Wilmerdonx, *Cort begryp der voornaemster dwalinghen*, (1626)¹⁸ or in Johannes Wtenbogaert's earlier plea for the Remonstrants to segregate from the "strict Calvinists and sectarians",¹⁹ or in writings against Quakers and Socinians in the 1650s, as those by Joost van den Vondel and "Radbodus Reinardi".²⁰ Likewise interesting are the writings by, among others, Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) and Guilielmus Saldenus (1627–1694) against separation, on the occasion of the Labadists, a sect of orthodox Calvinists who actually seceded in order not to be tainted by the sins of the members of the public church.²¹

The pietist Calvinist Willem Teellinck (1579–1629) exemplifies the Dutch attitude towards Catholicism. On the one hand, he criticised, with boring repetitiveness, what he saw as the catholicizing tendencies of the Remonstrants in his pamphlet *Third complaint of the church against the unholy tally-stick of the Remonstrants* (1618). There he told the Remonstrants that they were 'tainted by the Roman beast', that they incline towards 'Popery, and aim to reinforce themselves with the Papists, Lutherans, Anabaptists and Libertines, in order to suppress the reformed religion'.²² According to

Tot naedeel der algemeyne warachtige kercke ofte gemeynte Godes, ende de slechter eenvoudiger menschen, ghenomen wt verscheyden Autheuren ende tot aenwysinghe van allen Staten der menschen, ende tot bescherminghe der kercke Godes van alsulcken lasteringhen, daermede sy vanden secten beswaert wert, daerinne mede verclaert wert hoe verre dat men den secten mach tegenstaen. (Dordrecht: Adriaen Jansz Bot, 1611), (Knuttel 1906).

¹⁸ Simon Wilmerdonx, *Cort begryp der voornaemster dwalinghen, van verscheydene secten, met de welcke de Ghereformeerde Kercke, in de leere geschil heeft: Ghestelt tot versterckinghe der Ghemeynte van Amsterveen, in de suyvere leere der waerheyd.* (Amsterdam: Paulus Aertsz van Ravesteyn, 1626), (Knuttel 3705).

¹⁹ Johannes Wtenbogaert, *Redenen, whaerom men...metten...Contra-remonstranten...gheen geestelijcke gemeenschap...houden...en mach* (Friburch [=Antwerpen], 1620): "rechte Calvinisten ende sectarisen", (A2).

²⁰ [Joost van den Vondel], *Tooneel der Gheest-dryvers, ofte xxvi vragen en antwoorden, met een aenmerckelijcke voor-reden: Alles tot klare overtuyginge niet alleen van de hedendaegsche Quaeckers, maer van alle die de H. Schrift ontkennen te zijn het waerachtige Woordt Gods. En 't ordinaris middel van 's menschen bekeeringe en weder-geboorte.* (Haarlem: Dominicus Jansz de Graver, 1657), (Knuttel 7912); Radbodus Reinardi, *De ontdekte veinsing der heedendaegsche geest-dryvers en sociniaenen*, (1655), (Knuttel 7714).

²¹ [Willem Saldenus], *Syngramma, of zedige en ernstige bedenkingen over de staet der Gereformeerde Kerke, in sonderheyt in opsig van scheydinghe van de zelve. Tot onderrichtinghe, ende waerschouwinge van veelen*, (Utrecht: Jacob van Doeyenborgh, 1670), (Knuttel 9861); Gisbertus Voetius, *Gevoelen omtrent de particuliere by-een-komsten der Christenen. Kortelijck uyt sijne schriften te samen getrocken*, (Utrecht: Willem Clerck, 1677), (Knuttel 11555).

²² [Willem Teellinck], *Derde klachte der Kercken, teghens den Heylloosen Kerf-stock der Remonstranten: Tot bewijs dat de selve na het Pausdom hellen, ende haer met de Papisten, Martinisten, Mennonisten, ende Libertijnen soecken te verstercken, om de Ghereformeerde*

Teellinck, the five articles of the Remonstrants were like a 'Trojan horse', intended to 'finally re-introduce Popery into the City of God'.²³ Towards the Catholics themselves, however, Teellinck's attitude was one of benign neglect. He accepted their existence outside the Reformed church, and as long as Catholicism stayed outside that church he was content. Indeed, later in the pamphlet he made this clear, remarking: 'I am not talking about the Catholics among you, because what should we judge those who are outside [of our church]'.²⁴ Teellinck's position was in line with later writers who also considered disagreement within the public church more dangerous than the theology of distant sects.

The predestination war that started in full force in 1611—after the Hague Conference of the same year, and the troubles around the attempted appointment of Conradus Vorstius to Arminius's chair in Leiden—was consistent with previous developments, as attention was focused increasingly upon the fight against internal enemies, who unlike the Catholics, were not 'outside', but inside. One short pamphlet compares unfavourably the five articles of the Remonstrants to the orthodoxy of the Reformed church, while addressing the Remonstrants as the new Arians, Pelagians, Socinians, Samosatrinians.²⁵ This is the same tactic that we have seen in Teellinck, and it illustrates the same concern for the purity of the Reformed Church. This use of sectarian labels to denounce the enemy within was one of the many strategies of the Contra-Remonstrants to justify their lack of zeal concerning the sects. Caspar Grevinchovius still wrote in his argument against the sects published in 1611, after his death, that we cannot stand idly by while others go astray, but in practice he recognised that the sects were a (numerous) reality of life. At the other end of the period discussed, Saldenus would reprimand the (orthodox-pietist) followers of Jean Labadie (1610–1674) for segregating from the public church tainted by sin as they saw it, reminding them that they have to suffer the 'vessels

Religie te onderdrucken, door Ireneum Philaletium, (Amsterdam: M. Jz. Brant, 1618), 6: 'besmettinge met het Roomsche beeste'.

²³ Ibid., 10: 'als door het Paerd van Troyen eyntelick het geheele Pausdom wederom in de stadt Godes in te voeren.

²⁴ Ibid., 5–6: 'ick segghe niet de Papisten onder u, want wat hebben wy die ghene die buyten zijn te oordelen.

²⁵ *Een kort en waerachtich verhael, wat voor een grouwelijck ghevoelen dat de Arminianen, Vorstianen, ofte nieuwe Arrianen, Pelagianen, Socinianen, Samosatrinianen ghesocht hebben in de Ghereformeerde Kercke in te voeren, en in kort hier teghen gestelt het ghevoelen der Ghereformeerde Kercke*, (Gedruckt buyten Rome, 1612), (Knuttel, 2009). 'Printed outside Rome' is given as information on the frontispiece.

of his wrath, prepared for destruction' that God has placed amidst them, thereby referring again to the double predestination, as if he wanted to remind them of a previous, forceful logic.²⁶

The Contra-Remonstrants objected to the doctrines of Arminius and his followers, but this did not mean that they were in favour of widespread persecution. Since the Dutch Reformed church generally made no claims to universality, or to embrace the entire population, its members were quite content to allow those they saw as heterodox or heretical to exist outside their own church. Thus in an anonymous, 1612 pamphlet,²⁷ the author was pragmatic about the persecution of sectarians. On the one hand it is argued (p. 15) that a heretic can be a good citizen, that government has no business in persecuting religious opinions, and emperors have unnecessarily made many martyrs. The author of this pamphlet refers explicitly to Johannes Brentius (1499–1570), avowedly one of the very few of Luther's disciples who opposed the persecution of the Anabaptists.²⁸

Allow the heretics to teach what they prefer, since one is in no way bound by their straying, everyone is allowed to say what he wants, but everyone does in the end not get what he aims at. There go many words in one sack... If it were true that the Anabaptists learn with the Monks, we persecute them without ground. But if it is a lie, why don't we ridicule them? A visible lie does not deserve an answer, and is more worthy of laughter than replies.²⁹

It would be impossible to ban all Catholics on grounds of heresy, he argues, explaining:

O dear, where would all papists gather together, where would one find sufficient executioners and axes, to destroy them all, or who could write all the bans, and announce all the judgements and sentences?³⁰

²⁶ [Saldenus], *Syngramma*, 13. Reference to Romans 9.21–3.

²⁷ *Van't ketter-dooden. Een cort ende Schrifmatich Tractaet, Wat ende wie een Ketter is, of men een Ketter met recht mach onthlyven, martelen, ende eenighe pijne aendoen*, (1612) (Knuttel 2010).

²⁸ See his 'Ob eine weltliche Obrigkeit mit göttlichem und billigem Recht möge die Wiedertäufer durch Feuer und Schwert vom Leben zum Tode richten lassen' (1529).

²⁹ 'Men laet de kettters leeren wat se willen, soo en is men nochtans aen haer dwalinghe niet ghebonden, alleman mach doch segghen wat hy wil, maer alle man en heeft ende in dorr niet wat hem lust. Daer gaen veel woorden in eenen sack... Ist de waerheyt, dat de Doopers met de Monicke leeren, soo vervolghen wyse onrecht. Maer ist een leughen, waerom en bespotten wy 't niet? Een openbare leughen en is doch gheen antwoorde weert, ende meer lachens dan antwoordens weerdich', *Van 't ketter-dooden*, 17.

³⁰ 'Lieve waer soudén alle Papisten blyven op eenen hoop, waer soude men Beuls ende houes ghenoech eenghen, om dese alle te verbranden, oft wie conde de Banbrieven alle schryven, ende de oordeelen ende sententien alle declareren?' *Ibid.*, 23.

One important reason for this fairly tolerant attitude towards those who did not belong to the Reformed Church was a widely acknowledged belief that the commercial success of the Dutch-Republic depended upon good relations with non-Calvinists. This is clear from the introduction to the Dutch translation of Beza's tract on heresy by two Sneek ministers, one of whom was Johannes Bogerman (1576–1637), later president of the Synod of Dordt:³¹

We fear also that (since we hear it being said every day that we would lose arts and trade if the heretics were forced to leave) the God of trade is being worshipped. But even if in the execution of so great a work and in obedience to God's commands one were to lose all trade (while, however, the opposite appears to be true) were it not better to possess little in good and unperturbed conscience, not having to fear the wrath and fury of the high mighty God, before whom everyone has to give account of his office, rather than have lands and cities full of trade and at the same time a gnawing worm and trembling heart in the fear that this external gain obtained by vicious means will lead to evil endings. It is better to have little in peace and love, than much in the hate of people.

Beza's translators elaborated on the theme of a middle way, in which a person can be Christian while still seeking to secure external and temporary possessions for himself. Yet they suggest that following the narrow road of true religion will eventually lead to greater, real riches. Close to Stoicism in this respect of rejecting external goods, they were also close to Stoicism in the doctrine of predestination itself, rejecting the association however on account of the presumed negation of God's freedom by the Stoics. An issue that is not really addressed in this book—either by the translators, or by Beza himself—is the practical matter of execution. The 'persecution of sects' was generally unsuccessful, and when disciplinary action was taken against a minister of a Calvinist church, he could usually find a safe haven in his own or another's sect outside of the established church. Non-conformists and sectarians, therefore, were commonplace in the Dutch Republic, and not even the followers of Beza could expect to overcome these practices. Ironically, these practices would even threaten the right—orthodox—wing of the public church, as we can see from

³¹ Theodorus Beza. *De haereticis a ciuili magistratu puniendis libellus, aduersus Martini Bellii farraginem, et nouorum academicorum sectam*, (Geneva: Robert Estienne, 1554). The edition is: Théodore de Bèze, [tr. and intr. Johannes Bogerman]. *Een schoon tractaet des godtghelcerden Theodori Bezae vande straffe, welcke de wereltlijcke overicheydt over de ketters behoort te oeffenen, teghen Martini Bellii tsamenraepsel, ende der secte der nieuwe Academisten*, (Tot Franeker: by Gillis van den Rade, 1601).

Saldenus's and Voetius's strictures on the followers of (the orthodox minister) Jean Labadie for leaving the public church, shaming them by a comparison with Mennonites, those masters of schism, and separatists like Coorhert, Wiggerts and Pijnakker.³² Here, sects are criticised by appeal to a religious truth that the Labadists themselves would not deny, and yet they had to oppose the consequences. The truth of the matter was that the Labadist sect showed little concern and simply continued its practices.

In a very revealing work, written at the height of the predestination debates, the partisan Calvinist, Jacobus Trigland (1583–1654) explained what he considered to be the essential meaning of toleration.³³ Trigland had trained for the priesthood in Leuven, converted to the Reformed faith, and was between 1610 and 1634 a charismatic minister in the Amsterdam Reformed church that helped to defeat the Remonstrants in 1618–9, before becoming professor of theology in Leiden. In his influential early publication of 1615, he speaks of 'moderation and toleration'—'*moderatie en verdraagzaamheid*'—and is explicit in what he does not mean by this: it is not about civil moderation, i.e. it is not about civil liberties. Nor has it to do with the religious sects, says Trigland, because the sects are actually allowed in the republic. The issue of moderation concerns toleration within the church, and particularly within the Calvinist church. On Trigland's account we must not be meek or lenient towards our elect brethren: 'this may take place to some extent in politics, but not within the community of God. The rule of the Apostle is clear: One should not do evil in order to bring about good things... because if one yields everything is lost' [p. 2]. On the basis of this distinction between the utilitarian nature of politics and the truthfulness of religion, Trigland describes a concept of religious unity that is unyielding: 'No peace in the church is to be achieved other than that arising out of a unanimous assent to the Holy truth. Even

³² [Saldenus], *Syngramma*; on 17 we find Jean Labadie, former priest and pietist, described as 'a certain gentleman, recently arrived in Zeeland from France', continuing: 'The real schism-makers are the Anabaptists, and Wiggerts, Coornhert, Pijnaker who established their own association out of which nothing came in the end', reflecting again the *Kerkelijke Geschiedenissen* of Trigland. ('zeker Heer, binnen weynig tijd uyt Vrankrijk in ons Land, in Zeelandt, overgekomen.... Het zijn de Mennisten die scheuren na scheuren; het zijn Wiggerts, Coornhert, Pijnaker die een eigen societeit oprichtten die tot niets gekomen is.')

³³ Jacobus Trigland, *Den recht-gematichden christen. Ofte vande ware moderatie, ende verdrachsaemheyt, die tot behoudinge vande waerheyt ende vrede inde ghemeynten Christi, na Godes woort onderhouden moet worden*, (Amsterdam: P. van Ravesteyn, 1615), (Knuttel 2209).

if one wanted to introduce the moderation of our adversaries, this would not be practicable'.³⁴

Behind these two tracts is a religious epistemology in which Trigland recognises the sinful hubris of individual conscience—and seeks to correct this. According to Trigland the individual is too weak to get anywhere without the support of the community of the saints, who will find the truth collectively where the individual would fail. His argument is directed against the academic theologians like Grotius himself, who look down on the zealous crowds and their demagogic leaders. But how could he explain his position without creating an even greater uproar?

In his *Kerkelijke Geschiedenissen*, in which he reflected upon the events of the first decades of the seventeenth century, Trigland elaborated the epistemological issues involved. To follow the truth requires us to find it in the first place. Now the Arminian tradition, from Dirck Coornhert onwards, emphasised individual conscience as the yardstick of truth. This leads to discord, and hence is the wrong way. Against this emphasis on individuality, Trigland stressed instead the central position of the community of believers. This is not an attempt at democracy, but rather an attempt to reintroduce the mystic body of the church into Calvinism. This mystic body is however not of human, but of divine origin, ordained from eternity, viz. in God's eternal decree by which he has ordained some for salvation and the others for destruction. The concept of double predestination as it had been articulated by Theodor Beza, helped Trigland to allow the sects to exist. On his view, God has already taken care of them and they are all destined for hellfire. But it also allowed him to overcome the argument, based on individual conscience, of his Arminian opponents. According to Trigland it was the community of true believers, the vessels of the Lord, who should maintain unity and unanimity. Moreover, this was in line with the 'Stoic' rejection of external goods, i.e. the unavoidable acceptance of the Anabaptists and other sects no longer had to be based on an appeal to the economy and the war effort, because we can rely on

³⁴ Jacobus Trigland, *Verdediging van Den recht-gematichden christen Iacobi Triglandij, tot voorstant van de rechtsinnighe onderlinghe verdraeghsaemheyt, teghens de vermomde onderlinghe verdraeghsaemheyt Iacobi Taurini ende sijn verwart boeck vande selve*, (Amsterdam, M. J. Brandt, 1616), (Knuttel 2267), p. 109: Datter gheen ander vrede in de kercke Gods en is te bekomen, dan die rijst uyt de eendrachtighe toestemminge in de Heylige waerheyt: also dat, al wilde men schoon soodanighe moderatie by der handt nemen, als onse modérateurs voor stellen, het nochtans gheensins practicabel en is.

God in both domains, according to the Beza-Trigland argument. We only have to accept the 'vessels of God's wrath' around us.

Trigland wanted to establish strict doctrinal conformity within the Reformed church, but other Contra-Remonstrants sought to include as many Christians as possible within the Reformed communion. This approach can be seen in the writing of Godeschalcus Aeltius (1575–1649), published in 1612 as *Querela Pacis*.³⁵ Aeltius was at that time Contra-Remonstrant minister in Bolswert (Frisia). He made a plea for brotherly peace, following Erasmus's *Querela Pacis* as a model. Although he had completed his education in Leiden with a dissertation on the errors of the Anabaptists, and had acted at the Synod of Dordt on the Contra-Remonstrant side, he still sought at various moments in his career to re-establish fraternal communication with the Remonstrants. In the *Querela Pacis* Aeltius had already argued that mutual peace and concordia are the basis of the successes against the Popish inquisition and the Spanish tyranny, and that nothing is more important than to keep civil and religious peace. He enumerated eighteen reasons in support of this endeavour. Aeltius mentioned in the introduction that he had composed this text some time before and now wanted to publish it. The text is notably silent on the predestination issue. It argues for virtue, including justice, and cites Cicero to the effect that in a free republic nothing is more scandalous than ambition.³⁶ Similar pleas by Franciscus Junius and Dirck Coornhert were posthumously reprinted.³⁷

Aeltius was not the only Contra-Remonstrant minister to advocate a policy of comprehension. The Contra-Remonstrant minister Willem Saldenus would write in 1664 in defence of religious unity, brotherly love and toleration.³⁸ His main goal was, apparently, to heal the wounds created by

³⁵ *Querela Pacis, dat is Vreden-clacht, aen die vereenichde Nederlanden, waerinne de vrede haer beclaecht datse onder den schijn van vrede ofte trevis, beyde uyt die Kerkelijcke ende Burgelijcke regeringhe wort verdreven ende verbannen, Tot navolginghe des gheleerden en wüitberoemden D. Erasmi Roterodami, aldus ghestelt ende op den teghenwoordighen tijt ghepast, ter eeren Godes, ende waerschouwinghe des Vaterlandts.* (Leeuwarden, 1612), (Knuttel 1991).

³⁶ See *Querela pacis*, p. 24, on cupiditas regnandi, with reference to Cic. *off.*, III.36.

³⁷ F. Junius, *Den Vreedsamen Christen*, (Delft: Adriaen Gerritsz, 1612), (Knuttel 2004); D. Coornhert, *Vre-reden of Onderwijs tot eendracht, vrede ende liefde, in dese tijden hoochnoodich*, (Gouda: Jasper Tournay, 1612), (Knuttel 2014).

³⁸ [Gelasius Mullens pseudo.], Willem Saldenus, *Neerlands Interest, tot vrede der kercke, en wegh-neminge van alle opkomende misverstanden in de selve. Op 't onpartijghste en zedighste voor-gesteld*, (Middelburg, Yemant Hendrickß, 1664); in translation the title reads: 'Netherlands' interest, for peace of the church and the removal of all arising misunderstandings therein. Presented in a most unpartisan and modest way.

the expulsion of the Remonstrants from the Reformed church. He argued for comprehension, for an end to the forcing of consciences, especially on issues that are not essential to salvation; he claimed that Christ had died for all; he accepted the separate responsibilities of government; and he put forward many other positions that are usually associated with the Remonstrants rather than the Contra-Remonstrants. Saldenus was also a careful reader of Lipsius, and he understood that the dangerous aspect of religious persecution and sectarianism is that factionalism in religion destroys unity. In the long list of 'does and don'ts' in his *Netherlands' Interest, for peace of the church* he includes the following:³⁹

Don't take the name of a faction, as Lipsius says: 'insignia ulla, aut discrimina Nominum, aut vestium convenit permittere'.⁴⁰ If it then finally comes to it that one starts talking in terms of 'Hoeken en Kabeljouwten',⁴¹ and the different brethren are called after this or that person, issue or place, then one really raises the blood flag, for the sake of which each will fight as if *pro aris et focis*, as long as he can, if not for the cause, then at least for the name only.⁴²

Saldenus' pleas for prudence in religious politics, and self-restraint among ministers in their censure of politicians, are another indication that not all Contra-Remonstrants were uncompromising in their quest for religious truth. As Saldenus argues, with reference to Hugo Grotius, among others: 'habenda hic temporum, habenda et locorum ratio'.⁴³ And he goes on to quote Vedelius, to the effect that 'prudence is the helmsman of all virtues—zeal moderated by prudence; this prudent zeal and zealous prudence is also important when choosing the means, since they are to be chosen according to the circumstances'.⁴⁴

³⁹ Ibid., 45ff.

⁴⁰ Lipsius, *Politica*, 6.3.

⁴¹ The quintessential indication of factional strife, referring to the fifteenth-century Burgundian conflict between ca. 1390 and 1428.

⁴² "Als 't dan daer toe begint te komen, dat men als van Hoecks en Cabeljauws begint te spreken, ende de verschillende Broederen na dese of ghene persoon, saeck, of plaets beginnen benaemt te worden; dan steekt men eerst te recht de *Bloedt-vlagh* op, voor welcke dan een yeghelijck lichtelijck, als *pro aris et focis*, soo langh sal kampen, als 't hem mogelijck is; is 't niet voor de saeck, ten minsten voor de name". Saldenus, *Neerlands Interest*, 49.

⁴³ Ibid., 51, the Latin quotation is from Grotius, *De imperio*, 6, p. 134.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 51. Contra-Remonstrant Nicolaas Vedelius (1596–1642) was professor in theology at Geneva (1618–30) Deventer (1630–39) and Franeker (1639–42). He had argued in his *De episcopate Constantini* (Franeker, 1642) for 'a *via media* between Roman and Lutheran, the Arminian and Anabaptist theories. The *via media* was true because it avoided the errors of the four extremes, and therefore the principles upon which it was constructed

The explosion of debate between Remonstrants and Contra-Remonstrants thus had had a double function: to obfuscate the very fact of toleration of non-Calvinist denominations, and on the other to find a balance between comprehension and indulgence within the Calvinist church proper. That balance continued to be a subject for discussion. After 1650 irenic tendencies similar to those of Aeltius and Junius revived anew. Already in 1629, when Prince Frederik Henry aimed at a quiet re-establishment of the Remonstrants in the Netherlands, the calls for religious peace had reappeared, calls for reconciliation of Remonstrants and Contra-Remonstrants, as well as more general schemes for the unity of all Christian churches. The predestination controversy was an exception to the much more irenic trend of Dutch religious life. As Mark Ellis comments:

In sum, the Arminian controversy was not a debate between the reformed and “heretics” who had grown up in their midst. Rather, this conflict reflected social, political, religious and ethnic factors which originated before the Reformation. The Dutch Reformation built upon a strong base of Catholic and humanist renewal movements, accompanied by a spirit of toleration and assisted by specific political realities. National characteristics of Erasmian toleration and Erastian ecclesiology brought earlier Dutch reformers into direct conflict with the theological and political purposes of Calvinist refugees. In the end, its resolution depended far more upon the force of arms and political manoeuvring than the effectiveness of Scripture, reason and conscience.⁴⁵

The wide variation among Contra-Remonstrants as far as the issue of sectarianism is concerned may come as a surprise to those who have approached the history of toleration in the Netherlands from the perspective of Pieter Geyl or Jonathan Israel. In the early years of the great religious civil war, a great variety of opinions existed concerning the acceptability

must be true themselves’, Douglas Nobbs, *Theocracy and toleration. A study of the disputes in Dutch Calvinism from 1600 to 1650*, (Cambridge, 1938), 111–129, quotation on 118. The reference is to book 3, cap 2, 244 of *De prudentia veteris ecclesiae libri tres, ex antiquitate ecclesiastica, secundum scripturas sacras* (Ámsterdam: Johannes Janssonius. 1633) where Vedelius showed himself more of an Erastian than a Calvinist.

⁴⁵ Mark A. Ellis, *Simon Episcopus’ doctrine of original sin* (New York, 2006), 29–30. Arminius (1560–1609) was born in Oudewater, lost his family to the Spanish fury, and was a student in Marburg, the centre of Melanchtonian theology, with the mathematician Rudolphus Snellius, follower of Ramus; but he was also with Beza in Geneva. In 1587 he became a minister in Amsterdam, the first Dutchman in that post; in 1602 he was appointed professor of theology in Leiden, the first Dutchman to be appointed. His predecessors from the South, the ‘Walloon’ Lucas Trelcatius and the Frenchman Franciscus Junius, had died from plague that year.

of sects, disagreements and the scope of religious discipline in the Dutch setting. If anything, this demonstrates that there was no unique stereotyping which would help to discern a level of heterodoxy. Although the Contra-Remonstrants were worried about the presence of Remonstrant ideas within the public church, and Remonstrants were more likely to try to combine the quests for purity and unity, neither considered it advisable to persecute those who stood outside the church. Indeed, many thought that it was possible to be a good citizen while dissenting from the Calvinist church, in particular with a view of (economic) support of the war effort. At the same time, however, some Contra-Remonstrant ministers were willing to countenance a form of comprehension, which might allow some of the Remonstrants to remain within the public church. But there never was agreement within the public church as to the definition of this comprehension.

It is important to recognise the many factors which underlay the predestination controversy. Jonathan Israel describes the nature of the religious conflicts in the early Dutch republic in the following words:

in Holland and Utrecht two rival traditions emerged during the 1570s and 1580s... the orthodox Calvinist wing... advocated intolerance... 'Libertine' regents, by contrast, not only wished to restrain the power of the Church,... but also wanted it to be theologically flexible... In this way 'party-factions' came into being, in Dutch civic and provincial life and politics, which, on the one hand, were built out of patronage networks and family influence, giving them (in part) the characteristics of clientage systems, competing for influence and office, and, on the other, represented ideological and theological streams, conflicting attitudes to religion, education, culture, and life-style. The linkage of factional and clientage characteristics with political ideology and theology, was to prove one of the enduring, fundamental features not only of the Golden Age but the entire history of the Republic.⁴⁶

This was Israel's analysis in his *Dutch Republic* of 1995. In the more recent *Radical Enlightenment* his view has skewed to a more one-sided picture, presenting the radical Dutch masters of the mind in opposition to a fundamentalist Calvinism, with all the characteristics of what Spinoza deciphered as politics of superstition. Let me unpack these two positions of Israel. The really new aspect about Dutch politics in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is the very idea of toleration. As I have

⁴⁶ Jonathan Israel. *The Dutch Republic. Its rise, greatness, and fall 1477–1806* (Oxford, 1995), 391–2.

argued, toleration is the mirror image of the absent state church in the Republic. Israel describes this toleration as the desire on the part of what he calls 'libertine regenten' to restrain the power of the church and maintain more tolerant policies and allow for theological flexibility. Yet the regenten were often followers of Lipsius who had seen the merits of his arguments on *prudencia mixta* and on the logic of religion among the ordinary people. They had strong reasons of state for wanting to shape Dutch religion as they did, and their views were well suited to the practicalities of life in the Republic.

My discussion has shown that the genealogy of the dispute between 'Calvinists' and 'Libertines' is more confused than Israel suggests. In the several pamphlets discussed until now, we have also seen Contra-Remonstrants defend toleration, and Remonstrants call for purity. It is important to remember that the likes of Coornhert might defend toleration, yet strongly opposed what they called false religion, 'valsche religie'. These things taken together provide for a kaleidoscopic panorama of cross-cutting tendencies and tensions. Criticism of sects was often combined with a policy of leaving them to their own wits, and particularly in the years of the predestination conflict attempts were made to redefine older publications, and rewrite church history. This was all predicated upon a world with a lot of voiced dissent—and easy exit from the public church. We will now turn to the case of Hugo Grotius.

Grotius's intellectual achievements and religion

Hugo Grotius was deeply involved in these religious developments. His public defence of the policies of the Land's Advocate Johan van Oldenbarnevelt when he attempted to suppress the *furor theologica* developing in the 1610s established him as a founding member of the Remonstrant party, both through his writing and by political action. His subsequent condemnation for treason, together with his patron, followed by his famous escape from Castle Loevestein in 1621, made Grotius even more highly visible as a leader of the Arminian or Remonstrant camp. Moreover, Grotius was unwilling in 1631 to disown his Remonstrant views on doctrine and on church politics, when this was requested in return for permission to return to the Republic. In this he was unusually exposed, for many Remonstrants never left the Republic in the wake of the Synod of Dordt, and others who had were allowed to return in silence. Grotius' value for the Remonstrant cause was both symbolic and real, given his

close co-operation with the leaders of the Remonstrant faction like the minister Johannes Wtenbogaert, and the scholar Gerardus Vossius. In his early years, however, he had gone in a different, more secular, direction, and it was his frustrated Dutch political career which made him opt for an increasingly theological scholarship. Indeed, as I shall now argue, his theological writing was in many ways a distraction from his true achievements—and shows that in itself the religious context of the Dutch Republic was not necessarily conducive to intellectual achievement.

Before the *furor theologica* of 1610s, Grotius wrote mainly historical, juridical and political works, as well as poetry. These reflected his youthful ambition to hold political office in the administration of Holland and the Republic at large. His assignment to write a history of the Dutch war of independence should be seen as a contribution to his political career. Showing his acumen, he became increasingly involved in policy formulation. The most well-known of his writings of this time are his justification of the colonial warfare against Portugal in the East Indies, in *De iure praedae commentarius* (1604–5), the text that would eventually lead to *De iure belli ac pacis* of 1625. During the peace negotiations that would lead to the Twelve-Years Truce (1609–1621) he rewrote chapter 12 of *De iure praedae* into *Mare liberum* (published in 1609) in order to make the case that the Dutch trade with the East should not be bartered for peace with Spain. The historical works that justify the Republic are the *Annales et historiae de rebus Belgicis* (published in 1657, but finished in 1612), the *Parallelon rerum publicarum*, finished around 1600, to be published in the nineteenth century, and *De antiquitate* (published in 1610).⁴⁷ Even when Grotius published on religious topics as in his drama *Adamus exul* (1601), widely reprinted in the seventeenth century in England in various translations, his interest was matters of sociability, as when he questions the scapegoat role of Eve. There were no theological polemics, and in the chapter ‘de religion et pietate’ that concludes the *Parallelon* Grotius wrote characteristically of the Greek and Roman philosophers: ‘Nonnulli naturam dictantem adeo non audierunt, ut ausi fuerint negare numen esse aut curare mortalia’ (p. 115). This same naturalist perspective—the not listening to *nature* leading to the denial of God and his care—will

⁴⁷ On Grotius’s youthful writings, see H. Nellen and H. Trapman (eds.), *De Hollandse jaren van Hugo de Groot (1583–1621)*, (Hilversum, 1996); Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572–1651*, (Cambridge, 1993); and the issues of *Grotiana* devoted to *De iure praedae* (vol. 26–28) and *Mare liberum* (vol. 30, 2009).

underlie *De veritate* as much as *De iure belli ac pacis*, as in the famous and much discussed statement in the Prolegomena, §11 of the *De iure belli*: 'Et haec quidem, quae iam diximus, locum aliquem haberent, etiamsi daremus, quod sine summo scelere dari nequit, non esse deum, aut non curari ab eo negotia humana'. Those 'matters which we have discussed' were that there is justice (against Carneades) and that the laws of nature explain to us what it is. Listening to nature thus makes us understand both that God exists and that human justice is consistent even with his non-existence, or at least his lack of interest in human affairs. In such a perspective, denominational disputes in theology were of little account.

A core element in all these texts is the emphasis on *fides* as the key principle of sociability. Grotius connects this notion of *fides* to the commercial nature of Dutch society: '*fides commerciorum*'. 'Indeed, everywhere else private interests corrupt the public good, but here concord is supported by a continuous trust'.⁴⁸ In the *Parallelon* the conclusion is undeniable: Dutch merchants have to trust each other, because otherwise the transaction costs are too high. 'A man a man, a word a word', is Grotius's summary of this fundamental attitude, which is the basis of the successful trading companies. This precise notion of *fides* will then be elaborated in the other great achievement of Grotius in the writings on legal matters. In *De iure praedae*, Grotius develops the notion of trust even more emphatically in relationship to freedom: 'man is born free and in his own right'. He uses it to give a *nova declaratio* of the distinction between natural law and the law of nations,⁴⁹ to name but one of the achievements that Grotius himself recognised in that work. Ever since Jean Barbeyrac drew attention to Grotius as the *auctor intellectualis* of modern natural law, in the short history of natural law which he prefixed to his French edition of Pufendorf's *Ius naturae et gentium*, there has been an apparently never ending discussion about the exact location of Grotius in the development of natural law, from its Stoic origins, its Roman law principles and Scholastic elaborations, to the great systems of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. On the basis of his intellectual style, his strong reliance on *consensus omnium* as the principle of truth, and therefore his con-

⁴⁸ Johan Meerman (ed.), *Hugonis Grotii, Batavi, Parallelon rerumpublicarum liber tertius: De moribus ingenioque populorum Atheniensium, Romanorum, Batavorum*, (Haarlem, 1801), vol. I, 91: "Quippealibi commune corrumpi privatae commodis, hic perpetua fide contineri concordiam." Grotius completed the Ms of the *Parallelon* in 1602.

⁴⁹ Grotius, *De iure praedae commentarius*, ed. by H. G. Hamaker (The Hague, 1868) ch. II, 27.

tinuous reference to authorities from the past, from biblical to poetical, philosophical and juridical sources of the previous two centuries, some commentators have denied Grotius a modern status. For these scholars Grotius is 'the last of the classics'. On the opposite side are those who argue that from his reception alone we must admit that Grotius was at the beginning of several far-reaching changes in legal and political thought.⁵⁰

Not surprisingly, therefore, many have chosen to identify Grotius's originality from a different angle: that of the great propagandist of toleration, individual conscience and separation of church and state. We find this tendency already in two of the important early eighteenth-century editions of *De veritate*: the Latin edition by Jean Le Clerc and the English edition based on it by John Clarke of Hull. The English translator Clarke writes about Grotius's principles:

Thus all Men are obliged to form a Judgement of Religion for themselves, and to be continually rectifying and improving it; they may be very helpful and assisting to each other in the Means of coming to this Divine Knowledge, but no one can finally determine for another; every Man must judge for himself. . . . [and be] accountable to God only. . . . Were all Christians to go upon this Principle, we would soon see an End of all the fierce Controversies and unhappy Divisions. . . . They ought not to disturb that Peace and Unity which ought to be amongst all Christians, for the sake of any Matters of Faith, any Differences of Opinion.⁵¹

Apart from the fact that this summary seems more appropriate for Gerard Noodt or Pierre Bayle, it underrates the extent to which Grotius was also pressing points of doctrine in his endeavours to determine the true contents of Christ's teaching. We must realise that *De veritate* claims that Christianity is true and outlines the content of true Christianity. Here Grotius is as much a purist as Dirck Coornhert.

Grotius could not ignore the controversy mounting over predestination in the 1610s, of course, and so his attention turned to theology and religion. In his writings on these subjects, Grotius shared many of the concerns of his fellow Remonstrants, but his strong desire for unity within

⁵⁰ This position is gaining weight even with those historians who study the relationship of Grotius to classical (juridical) sources. Good examples can be found in the *Mare liberum* issue of *Grotiana*, 30, (2009), where Martin Schermaier and Willem Zwolve identify Grotius's innovations; see 20ff.

⁵¹ Grotius, Hugo. *The truth of the Christian religion. In six books Grotius. Corrected and illustrated with notes, by Mr. Le Clerc. To which is added a seventh book concern question, what Christian church we ought to join our selves to; by the said Mr. Le Clerc. Done into English by John Clarke, M.A.* (London, 1711), Translator's Preface.

the church marked him out. Indeed, his commitment to a unified Christian community stood in contrast to Dutch political realities—and to the direction in which the Dutch Republic was going. Grotius' position can be seen clearly from his rhetorical advice to Sibrandus Lubbertus, calling on him to expel the Mennonites or Anabaptists from Frisia—'si potes', *if you can*.⁵² Here Grotius pointed to what from his perspective was inadmissible inconsistency: to fight minor disagreements within the public church and allow perfidious sectarians outside the public church. We should not mistake this for an embracing of toleration, let alone praise for heterodoxy. In the *Parallelon* Grotius had derided the Anabaptists, in particular the politically subversive actions of Jan of Leyde and David Joris "Non alterius cuiusque sectae magis metuenda perfidia est."⁵³ The Anabaptists refuse to perform public office, he argued, except when they see a chance for political control. In his later career, Grotius would consider sectarianism a major cause of religious decay, in line with many before him.⁵⁴ In the series of studies on essential elements of Christianity (baptism, antichrist, belief and works and the Decalogue), and finally in his commentaries on the two Testaments, finished in the 1640s, Grotius attempted to delineate the contours of a united Christianity in line with the *consensus omnium* of the early Church. Discovering the true meaning of Christ's teaching also meant explaining to what extent Protestantism had gone too far in its critique of Catholicism, and where the middle ground was to be found. As we have seen, the development in Dutch religious life was in the opposite direction: toleration became fashionable, yet unity was confined to individual denominations and individual (i.e. local) churches. The marriage of Erastian and Erasmian preferences among the political elite that made up the Remonstrant position, was subject to tension between these

⁵² The full passage is: "But you would like him [Conradus Vorstius, whom Lubbertus accused of Socinianism] to be conveyed outside Holland . . . to another country . . . On what charge? Of heresy, of course. So cite an example of that punishment in our republic, cite a law. Leaving aside the Romanists—although some today cannot tolerate the fact that they have God and Christ in common with us—Friesland is full of Anabaptists; they openly preach that children should not be baptised, that Christ did not receive flesh from the Ever-Virgin, that a Christian should not hold office and many other things. Expel them from Friesland, if you can; start with those who don't conceal these dogmas, who don't play with ambiguities, but openly admit them. Go on to those who do not acknowledge the dogmas they are charged with afterwards.' Hugo Grotius. *Ordinum Hollandiae ac West-frisiae pietas* (1613), *Studies in the History of Christian Thought*, 66, ed. by Edwin Rabbie, (Leiden, 1995).

⁵³ Hugonis Grotii *Parallelon*, vol. I, 91.

⁵⁴ See Henk Nellen, *Hugo de Groot. Een leven in strijd om de vrede 1683–1645*, (Amsterdam, 2007), 488.

two principles whenever the political leadership in religious affairs was contested by the likes of Bogerman and Trigland. The Erastians wanted political leadership and the Erasmians wanted toleration and comprehension. It was as if Grotius wanted to combine the doctrines of Justus Lipsius (“una religio”) and of Dirck Coornhert (freedom of prophesy). It certainly was a mistake to make toleration the principle of comprehension and to try to enforce that from the side of politics.⁵⁵

The 1616 oration to the magistrates of Amsterdam, in which Grotius explained the decision of the States of Holland on peace in the church, already shows this tension. There were two main issues he wanted to deal with: ‘the government of the churches, and the tolerance of some theological differences’.⁵⁶ On the one hand, the government of the church, in particular the nomination of ministers should be with the civil magistrate, although he allowed the church to verify the credentials of possible candidates. On the other hand, he argued that even for ministers the meaning of God’s word is often obscure and so some issues should not be addressed, let alone declared essential to salvation. Therefore, the preachers should limit their dogmatic exposition to the fundamentals or essentials of Christianity, and tolerate disagreement on other topics with their colleagues and the rest of the church members. Grotius insisted that ‘tolerance now should pertain also to these points [of God’s foreknowledge and predestination], and not just to the simple church members but also to the teachers, follows from *reason itself*, since the teachers are not exempt of ignorance and errors, and therefore are also among those whose weaknesses the others ought to help and support’.⁵⁷

In reality, church and state could not be easily separated and when Grotius requested for the magistrate the right to prophesy he was also claiming for the magistrate the right to adjudicate dogmatic conflicts: “[t]he States of Holland did nothing incompatible with their duty, nothing contrary to the Apostolic decrees when they investigated ecclesiastical

⁵⁵ See to this effect H. C. Rogge, *Wtenbogaert en zijn tijd*, 3 vols (Amsterdam, 1875), II, 193ff.

⁵⁶ *H. Groti Oratie, eertijds 1616 by hem gedaen voor de E.E. Achtbare Heeren Burghermeesteren ende Raden der Stadt Amsterdam, over 't houden van een Synodus ende Verdragen over Kerckelijcke geschillen*, (1646) (Knuttel 5379), 3.

⁵⁷ Groti Oratie, 8: “Dat nu tot dese Poincten de Tolerantie haer behoort uyt te strecken, niet alleen tot de gemeene Lidmaten,maer oock tot de Leeraers, brenghe de Reden selve mede, overmits de Leeraers niet exemt en zijn van onwetenheyt ende dwalingen, ende over-sulcx mede zijn onder het getal van de genen welcker swackheden de andere moeten helpen draghen.” My emphasis.

matters in their Assembly".⁵⁸ But the Amsterdam mission of 1616 ended in political failure. Once in Castle Loevestein, stubbornly engaged in his apology, Grotius returned to theology, first with *'t Bewijs van de ware godsdienst* (1621) and the natural theology of *De veritate* (1627) and then to the historical Bible studies of the *Annotationes*.⁵⁹

As Jean Le Clerc argued in his comment on Grotius's *De veritate religionis Christianae*:

Now since Grotius has not proved the Truth of the particular Opinions of any present Sect of Christians, but only of that Religion which was taught Mankind by Christ and his Apostles; it follows that that Sect of Christians is to be preferred before all others, which does most of all defend those things which Christ and his Apostles taught. In a word, That is in every particular truly the Christian religion, which without any mixture of human Invention, may be wholly ascribed to Christ as the Author.⁶⁰

It is arguable that in his theological writings Grotius removed himself more and more from the self-evident principles of his youth that he had shared with a group of Leiden humanists who would be his friends for all his life. It certainly seems a grand enterprise to embark on a quest for the true meaning of Christ's teachings in order to find the conditions of civil society and the separation of political and religious responsibilities.⁶¹ Grotius understood this quest as a historical one and his critical study of the Testaments was undertaken to reach this historical knowledge of Christ.⁶² To the extent that a historical orientation was characteristic of the humanism of the Leiden School, it may be conceded that Grotius's biblical scholarship was still true to its approach. But the Leiden humanist environment had also encouraged Grotius to adopt a less theological perspective in earlier writings. A theological perspective is missing from

⁵⁸ Grotius, *Pietas*, 163–7.

⁵⁹ *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* (Leiden / Amsterdam, 1640f); *Annotata ad Vetus Testamentum* (Paris, 1644f).

⁶⁰ Jean Le Clerc, 'A Book of Monsieur Le Clerc's concerning the choice of our opinion amongst the different sects of Christians', in: Grotius, *The truth of the Christian religion*, 288–326, at 296.

⁶¹ See Mark Somos, 'Enter secularisation: Heinsius's *De tragoediae constitutione*', *History of European Ideas*, (2009).

⁶² See Henk Jan de Jonge, 'Grotius' view of the Gospels and the Evangelists', in: H. J. M. Nellen and E. Rabbie (eds.), *Hugo Grotius Theologian. Essays in honour of G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes*, (Leiden, 1994), 65–74, who refers to Grotius's letter to P. Dupuy, *Briefwisseling*, II, no. 640 as a further proof that Grotius considered Christianity as 'dogma novum . . . perfecte a Christo revelatum, et per Apostolos per orbem totum iussum praedicari'. The Apostles are witnesses, the Gospels are witness reports.

the declaration in the introductory first chapter of *De iure praedae* that he will argue his case not from the basis of jurisprudence or religion, but from philosophy only, just as it is from the claim in the *De iure belli ac pacis* that the validity of the laws of nature does not hinge upon religion. We are left with a question: was it that Grotius in the end found himself arguing for secularisation by way of fundamental theological studies? Or should his theological and biblical studies be understood as a real break in his intellectual *Werdegang*?

Conclusion

'Voice' and 'exit' are strategies of expressing preferences that are typical of politics and economics, respectively. 'Voice' is fundamentally based in the idea that 'quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus deliberetur' and hence is fundamentally bound up by the rules and procedures that permit such a conversation without leading to a Babylonian confusion. Comprehension, indulgence, silencing and indoctrination are the elements of such a strategy: there are things that are 'not to be said', simply. But the heterodox do attempt to say these.

'Exit' is a strategy of the marketplace, and relies on actual consumer sovereignty in choosing one provider over another. As economists know too well, the idea of consumer sovereignty is predicated upon an idea of the perfect market, which is one of full information, and hence complete transparency, and divisibility of goods. In the actual world there are limits to the exit strategy: being an Anabaptist, a Jew, or a Lutheran excluded certain options in daily life that membership of the public Reformed Church did not. Thanks to that, the Reformed Church could continue to be the public church, and thus at least partially, and up to a point, continue its political fight over voice. But it never managed effectively to condemn a sectarian for being a heretic, as it did not have the means to truly wield monopolistic market power.

Compare here the comments of William Temple, whose *Observations on the United Provinces* was published in 1672 after a spell as English ambassador there. In his conclusion on religion in the Dutch Republic he wrote:

I believe the force of Commerce, Alliances, and Acquaintance, spreading so far as they do in small Circuits (such as the Province of Holland) may contribute much to make conversation, and all the offices of common life, so easie, among different Opinions, Of which so many several persons are

often in every man's eye; And no man checks or takes offence at Faces, or Customs, or Ceremonies he sees every day, As at those he hears of in places far distant, and perhaps by partial relations, and comes to see late in his life, and after he has long been possest by passion or prejudice against them. However it is, Religion may possibly do more good in other places, But it does less hurt here; And wherever the invisible effects of it are the greatest and most advantageous, I am sure the visible are so in this Countrey, by the continual and undisturbed Civil Peace of their Government for so long a course of years; And by so mighty an encrease of their people, Wherein will appear to consist chiefly the vast growth of their Trade and Riches, and consequently the strength and greatness of their State.⁶³

Apart from the *bon mot* that religion may do more good in other places, but less harm in the Netherlands, Temple's analysis of toleration finds the causes of its invisible and visible effects in commerce, alliances and acquaintances that make conversation among different opinions so easy, and ensure that no one 'takes offence at Faces, or Customs or Ceremonies'. As Temple suggests, in the United Provinces religious differences tended not to erupt into full-scale theological and political conflict; only in the extraordinary circumstances of the 1610s did this occur. Grotius, in *De iure praedae* and in *De iure belli ac pacis*, was an important architect of a modern theory of the market, yet in his private life he was forced to take the 'exit' strategy in the literal and drastic sense of leaving the country. But he justified himself along the lines of 'voice', attempting to argue for a truly catholic church that would transcend the petty bickering of denominations. Towards the end of his life, Grotius certainly grew wary of these petty denominations, as one would expect. The unfortunate exile had been denied the exit option, by being required to denounce his Remonstrant opinions. The unifying theology that Grotius attempted to produce became fashionable in the public church only in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Long before the fateful events arising from the exceptional outburst of intolerance in the 1610s, Grotius had pondered upon the relationship between commerce and society. In his *Parallelon rerum publicarum* that he composed around 1600, and to which project also belonged *De antiquitate*, published 1610,⁶⁴ and in *De iure praedae* of 1604/5, and then in *Mare liberum* (1609), Grotius articulated aspects of his understanding of a commercial society.

⁶³ William Temple, *Observations on the United Provinces*, 2nd edn, (London, 1673), 207–8.

⁶⁴ *Liber de antiquitate reipublicae Batavicae* (Leiden, Raphelengius, 1610).

The religious conflicts of the 1610s have tended to distract scholars from what we can now recognise as the real intellectual achievements of those involved, and this is particularly clear from the career of Hugo Grotius. Grotius had a sharp mind, and was one of a group of eminent thinkers inspired by J. J. Scaliger in Leiden at the end of the sixteenth century. Grotius's biblical criticism, aiming at the unity of Christianity, was certainly one of the straightforward results of his humanist training. But while Grotius may have considered his bible commentary the greatest work he was able to complete—'opus quod inter mea optimum puto'⁶⁵—this was not the opinion either of his contemporaries or of posterity. We shall not be distracted by his obstinate and unflagging pursuit of the ideal of Christian unity that escaped him in the 1610s, if we are willing to recognise that Grotius's real achievement is to be found in the pages on *mare liberum* and on the law of war and peace that were conceived and written from a fundamentally different perspective, explicitly independent of any religious position, valid even if God would not exist, and binding on pagans as well as Christians. Grotius had developed a similar position in *De Veritate*, seeking to establish grounds for the basic tenets of Christianity in natural religion. Together these positions provide the starting point for a major reorganisation of the basic concepts and fundamental theories of society and politics. If it is true that Grotius was appalled by what he read in Hobbes's *De cive*, then it is also understandable that in his later years Grotius had a different view of his own originality, believing "he had done much, but achieved little" as the apocryphal story of his last hours has it. Grotius was an exceptional mind who was caught by the contradictory forces of Dutch radicalism: toleration and purity. He was a living example that purity wasn't always on the side of the Contra-Remonstrants or the Pietists but could as easily be found among Remonstrant scholars. When Grotius reconsidered his intellectual achievements, he trusted his results in biblical scholarship more than his path-breaking work in law and politics. Not recognising Hobbes as his successor, nor the practicality of his conception of peace-making, Grotius overlooked his lasting achievements, maybe partly because, himself a sectarian, he had been blinded by the 'name of faction' and had overlooked how adequately he had diagnosed the secularisation of the society he lived in, and subsequently of the whole of the modern world.

⁶⁵ BW XI, 4972 (to W. de Groot, d.d. 15 December 1640).

HUMAN AND DIVINE JUSTICE IN THE WORKS OF GROTIUS AND THE SOCINIANS

Sarah Mortimer

It was broadly agreed among early modern Christians that God was just, but that simple proposition was interpreted in a striking variety of different ways, especially in the early seventeenth century. Some of the most challenging and creative conceptions of divine justice came from outside the major churches, but they set in motion a heated theological debate about God's righteousness and human salvation which soon spread across confessional boundaries. Moreover, this was not a debate restricted to theology, for God's justice tended to be understood with reference to earthly, human life—at least by the many Christians who believed that God and human beings recognised similar moral values. A discussion of salvation could therefore prompt a wide-ranging examination of justice, on earth as well as in the heavens. This chapter will show how one unusual theological agenda could shape discussion of justice in ways which were important not only for understanding how God treated human beings, but also how humans could and should deal with each other. Heterodox ideas about divine justice were a central part of early modern thinking about human communities as well as the cosmic community which included both God and men.

Some of the most heterodox and important views about divine justice were developed by the Socinians. This group of early modern Christians is now best known for their denial of the Trinity, but their theological ideas involved a thoroughgoing re-interpretation of the Christian message. Crucially, the Socinians argued by using the language of earthly jurisprudence rather than academic theology. In so doing they set their discussion of God and his actions firmly within a moral and legal context which included human life also. They came to the conclusion that most Christians—but particularly the Reformed—had misunderstood the way in which God chose to save human beings. They refused to accept that God needed to punish the sinful or that he inflicted this punishment on Christ, for they thought that such doctrines conflicted with both the scripture message and the true nature of justice. In response, more mainstream Christians began to consider what God's rights of punishment might be and how far

they might extend over humans. The subsequent debate raised questions about how God's treatment of human beings might relate to ideas of justice and punishment here on earth.

The Socinians believed that God dealt with human beings as one individual to another, responding to the deeds of particular persons. They insisted that he could forgive those who repented, while strenuously denying that he could punish those who had not themselves sinned. As this suggests, the Socinians felt that the rules of justice constrained God's actions, but without defining or determining them. Casting their argument in this way, the Socinians began to reflect upon the relationship of individuals to each other and to consider how these relationships might be constrained by the principles of justice. As we shall see, the ideas they generated became part of a broader argument about the natural rights of individuals and the ways in which these rights might underpin human communities. In this way, the heterodox beliefs of the Socinians had important consequences which would extend well beyond the field of theology.

I

It was through a heated argument in an inn in the Swiss town of Basle that the Socinian view of justice was first brought to a wider audience. There, one day in 1576, the Huguenot minister Jacobus Covetus (fl. 1570–1600) found himself face to face with a young Italian whose reputation for heterodoxy was rapidly growing. The Italian was Faustus Socinus (1539–1604), recently arrived in Basle after twelve years in Florence at the court of Grand-Duke Cosimo de Medici I (1519–1574). On Cosimo's death, Socinus had decided to join the large group of Italians who sought greater religious freedom in Basle, though Socinus soon found himself marginalised even there and he left for Poland in 1579.¹ Certainly he managed to stir up controversy while in Basle, and most spectacularly when Covetus stopped in the town *en route* to France. Covetus happened to overhear Socinus discussing his religious beliefs—and he was horrified. This Huguenot minister was not a man to allow heterodoxy to go unchallenged and he soon locked horns in a lengthy and protracted theological dispute with Socinus. Even after Covetus had left Basle this would continue, for the two men exchanged a number of letters. Socinus set out their different positions

¹ Earl Morse Wilbur, *A history of Unitarianism: Socinianism and its antecedents* (Cambridge, MA, 1946), 387–407.

in a work entitled *De Jesu Christo Servatore*; this circulated in manuscript from 1578, and was finally printed in 1594. The work not only sets out the theological quarrel which had so absorbed these two men; it also draws attention to the broader consequences of their different opinions. As such, it is a guide to the intellectual assumptions which underpinned Socinus' heterodoxy and Covetus' orthodoxy.

Everyone in the Basle inn could agree that Christ was the saviour of mankind, but Covetus and Socinus interpreted this statement in very different ways. Covetus, along with most mainstream Christians, insisted that Christ had come into the world to atone for the sins of humanity; to satisfy divine justice the Son of God had agreed to suffer death on the cross. Like many Reformed theologians of the late sixteenth century, he insisted that Christ had borne in full the penalty due for the sins of the elect, enabling God to forgive those chosen people even though they remained sinful. Christ was our saviour, Covetus argued, because he 'reconciled God to us by dying for us and thereby satisfying—fully and perfectly—the justice of God'.² To Socinus, however, this was a monstrous distortion of the message of scripture, amounting to a blasphemous description of God. He believed instead that Christ was our saviour because 'he announced to us the way of eternal life'; he had not satisfied divine justice, nor was there any need for him to have done so. God was merciful, Socinus insisted, and what he wanted was repentance and good works from individuals, not expiation for a whole community through the blood of Christ.³

Underlying their theological positions were different views about the meaning of justice, and particularly the justice which governed God's punishment of sinful men. Covetus presented a particularly strong version of the Protestant commitment to the perfect righteousness of God, righteousness which means that he must condemn those who fall short of such perfection. Towards men, on this account, God's justice is shown in his wrath; retribution lay at the heart of this concept of justice. In Covetus' words, justice was 'that by which God not only hates iniquity, but cannot allow it to go unpunished'.⁴ Covetus was fully signed up to the doctrine of justification by faith alone, of course, and he added that God had in his mercy chosen to make Christ suffer rather than human beings, thereby

² F. Socinus, *Fausti Socini Senensis Opera omnia in duos tomos distincta* (Irenopoli [i.e. Amsterdam], post anno 1656 [i.e. c.1668]) vol. II, 132.

³ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴ *Ibid.*; cf. Calvin's view as described in P. Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford, 2004), 299.

enabling the salvation of the elect. But Socinus objected strongly to such ideas, seeing in Covetus' argument a chaotic and immoral concept of justice, in which punishment had been detached from individual guilt. He insisted that God judged men according to their own actions, denying that it could ever be right to transfer guilt or merit from one person to another. What led God to forgive men, for Socinus, was not the expiatory death of Christ but each individual's own repentance and commitment to follow the laws set out by God through the ministry of Christ.⁵

Socinus' argument was driven by his theological concerns, by his desire to show that God was merciful to those who repented and sought sincerely to live in accordance with his laws. But rather than argue with Covetus along metaphysical lines, in the manner most usual among theologians,⁶ he chose instead to defend his claims with concepts drawn from jurisprudence, with fairly straightforward political analogies, and with what he believed to be the customs and practices of all nations. This strategy reflected his own education and upbringing, for he was not trained in academic theology. As the scion of a family famous for its legal expertise, and the son of a Professor of Civil Law, Socinus seems to have grasped some basic legal principles early in his life. Beyond that, however, he had little formal education, preferring to read for himself in the humanist tradition, especially the works of Erasmus.⁷ Arguing from these legal and moral ideas, Socinus hoped to demonstrate that the Protestants (or at least Covetus) must have read the scripture incorrectly, because their God transgressed the universal norms of justice and reason. In other words, he assumed that there were some basic rules which must apply to God, as they applied to all reasonable creatures, and that these rules guided and constrained God's actions and decisions.

Socinus never doubted that God could punish men legitimately; what he objected to was Covetus' claim that God must carry out such retribution because it was demanded by justice. The Italian accepted that men regularly sinned against God, and that as a consequence of their sins God obtained a right (*jus*) of punishment over them. Yet Socinus insisted that this right did not oblige God in any way; God's justice could not be

⁵ Socinus, *Opera omnia* vol. II, 128–9.

⁶ For an overview of the Reformed scholastic discussion of divine justice see R. Muller *Post-Reformation reformed dogmatics: the rise and development of reformed orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols, (Grand Rapids, 2003), III, 483–96.

⁷ Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*, 388–9. See also Socinus' *Opera Omnia*, I, 329, where he writes of 'the great Erasmus of Rotterdam'.

reduced to the exercise of rights of retribution. Instead, Socinus sought to define justice more broadly, as 'rectitude and equity'; both these concepts were, he thought, quite consistent with the practice of mercy, liberality and clemency. He turned to an earthly analogy to make his point, arguing that since human rulers could pardon criminals, God must be able to do the same by waiving his right of punishment. Here Socinus wanted to distance the right of punishment from rectitude or equity, and thereby to preserve God's discretion over the way in which that right could be used.⁸

What was most striking about Socinus' account of divine justice and punishment was that he described a relationship between individuals, abstracted from any wider community. God dealt with each human being as a single person, without reference to any wider laws or norms directed to society as a whole. Because of this, Socinus was careful to say that if we are to liken God to any human being, it must be to an absolute prince, one who is not bound not by any laws external to himself but only by the promises which he has made. The Italian insisted upon the distinction between God's power to pardon and forgive those who repented and the much more restricted authority possessed by a judge here on earth. For a judge was constrained by the laws and obligations which governed his service, while God was not answerable to any higher power. Although this was a fundamental difference, it had nothing to do with God's wisdom, power, or divine essence. It simply reflected the fact that God was free to use his rights as he wanted, just like any human creditor or like a human prince, neither of whom were answerable to anyone else for the use of their own rights. Here Socinus simply ignored the general consensus on punishment, according to which it was a political power belonging to a magistrate who ruled over others.⁹ Later Socinians would, as we shall see, draw out more fully the implications of Socinus' belief that the right to punish was no different from the right possessed by any individual to exact payment for a debt.

Socinus likened God to an absolute prince, but this did not mean that his rights and powers were unlimited. On the contrary, Socinus believed that God's options were often quite restricted. For God adhered to the promises which he had made with human beings, consistently rewarding

⁸ Socinus, *Opera omnia*, II, 186–8.

⁹ See the discussion in J. Tully, 'Locke' in J. H. Burns (ed., with the assistance of M. Goldie), *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700* (Cambridge, 1991), 620–22.

them when they obeyed him. And, even more importantly, God necessarily judged men on the basis of their own actions and their own obedience to his laws, pardoning the repentant and condemning those who failed to show remorse. To Socinus, merit or guilt were inescapably attached to particular individuals and could not be transferred. As this suggests, God had no sweeping powers to deal with humanity *en masse* but must treat them according to their own deserts. With this account of justice and punishment, Socinus could not accept any notion of vicarious satisfaction. God was free to forgive sin, but not to transfer punishment.

Socinus was confident that his account of divine justice and punishment sat more comfortably with human practices and intuitions than the doctrines of his more orthodox contemporaries. He insisted that both the 'light of reason' and 'the laws and customs of all people and all ages' confirmed that 'the corporal punishment which one person owes neither can nor should be paid by another'. Physical punishment could not, therefore, be legitimately transferred from sinful humanity to the innocent Christ. Similarly, human beings could not rely on Christ to fulfil God's commands for them; they had to put in the ethical and moral work themselves if they wanted to be rewarded with eternal life.¹⁰ Along these lines, Socinus insisted that neither God nor any true concept of justice could be said to require punishment or satisfaction.

There were two important strands in Socinus' argument. Socinus' discussion of justice and punishment began to open up space between action that was just, in the sense that it was not in itself evil and could be done with right, and action that fulfilled a higher standard of equity or rectitude. God and Christians would choose the latter, but they did so from a range of legitimate alternatives. Socinus and his followers were most interested in rectitude and equity but neither they nor their readers could ignore the broader meaning of justice, as action (like punishment) which is licit but neither necessary nor virtuous. Through *De Jesu Christo Servatore*, and the debate which it set in motion, Socinus began to open up the suggestion that there may be a framework of rules governing coercion and punishment which were, at the very least, logically distinct from notions of virtue or Christianity. Secondly, Socinus was suggesting that these rules were not dependent upon any political institutions or pre-existing agreements. Instead, they operated between individuals—because at the most fundamental level it was individuals who committed crimes, individuals

¹⁰ Socinus, *Opera omnia*, II, 195.

who suffered from these crimes and individuals who must decide whether to punish or forgive. The broader intellectual consequences of Socinus' religious ideas would be explored further in the seventeenth century.

II

Socinus died in 1604, ten years after the publication of *De Jesu Christo*, and it was in the half-century after his death that the implications of his arguments began to be worked out. In these years, his writings were taken up and discussed by men who, like Socinus himself, were not trained in theology but who were instead familiar with the language and concepts of jurisprudence and civil philosophy. The two most important commentators on Socinus' work were Hugo Grotius (1588–1645), the Dutch historian and jurist, and Johan Crell (1590–1633), rector of the Socinian academy at Rakow and the leading intellectual light of the Socinian movement. Both men staunchly defended the value of legal and philosophical concepts for the interpretation of scripture, assuming that God would adhere to the basic principles fundamental to these disciplines. They took up Socinus' claim about God's punishment being, at least in some sense, analogous to human punishment, and considered whether the Italian's model was true to the rules and norms of justice here on earth. As this suggests, their conceptions of the atonement and satisfaction became intertwined with a set of claims about how human beings could practise justice towards each other, even in the absence of any settled agreements.

Grotius began to read Socinus' works in the 1610s, when they were the subject of heated controversy in the United Provinces. In this decade, the young republic was riven with political and religious tensions, mostly between rival Calvinist and Arminian groupings. The Dutch Calvinists were loud in their denunciations of the heretical notions which they claimed were spreading among their enemies. Most damagingly, they portrayed the Arminians as beyond the pale of toleration and Christianity by associating their theology with the Socinians.¹¹ Grotius hoped to defend the

¹¹ See C. Bangs, *Arminius: a study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville, 1971); J. Israel *The Dutch Republic: its rise, greatness, and fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford, 1995) esp. 421–39; J. Rohls, 'Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism in the Netherlands until the Synod of Dort' in M. Mulrow and J. Rohls (eds.), *Socinianism and Arminianism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Leiden, 2005) 3–48; S. Mortimer, 'Human liberty and human nature in the works of Faustus Socinus and his readers', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 70, (2009), 191–211.

Arminian party from such charges and—in the process—to restore some intellectual order to theological discussion. For he feared that the Dutch public church was on the verge of being hijacked by Calvinist zealots.¹² Anxious to restrict the power of the Calvinist theologians, Grotius wanted to show that the scripture had to be interpreted using tools drawn from secular learning, tools which he and his academic friends possessed. To do this, he crafted an answer to Socinus' *De Jesu Christo* which was heavily based on juridical concepts and, as such, stood in sharp contrast to an earlier effort by a particularly belligerent Calvinist theologian.¹³ Through his *Defensio Fidei*, Grotius countered Socinus' critique of the concept of satisfaction by insisting that Socinus had not properly understood the legal aspect of the argument. As his editor G. J. Vossius put it, he decided 'to wrest from the adversary of the catholic faith those weapons which he took from the law'.¹⁴ Like Socinus, he believed—at least in the 1610s—that divine justice was no different from justice here on earth.¹⁵ But Grotius intended to show why Socinus' strictures against the doctrine of the atonement, brought from a false notion of punishment, were little more than petulant carping.

Socinus had, Grotius thought, failed to understand the true nature of punishment, with disastrous consequences for the Christian faith. Grotius rejected Socinus' individualistic view of divine punishment and set it firmly within the context of the universe as a whole. For him, punishment was essential for the preservation of the common good; it could not be renounced without endangering all social life. To emphasise the connection between punishment and the common good, Grotius argued that a right of punishment must be a special kind of right, quite distinct from a right of absolute ownership or a personal right. Unlike these latter rights, which are held by individuals, the right of punishment belonged, Grotius argued, to a ruler. Moreover, because it existed for the sake of the common good it must always be put into action, whereas a right of ownership existed to benefit the person who held it, and who could decide how (or whether) to implement it. As Grotius saw, Socinus had collapsed the right

¹² E. Rabbie (ed.) *Defensio fidei catholicae de satisfactione Christi, adversus Faustum Socinum Senensem* (Assen, 1990), 1–20.

¹³ This theologian was Sibbrandus Lubbertus, the author of *De Jesu Christo Servatore, hoc est cur et qua ratione Jesus Christus noster servitor sit, libri quatuor contra Faustum Socinum* (Franeker, 1611).

¹⁴ Rabbie (ed.), *Defensio fidei*, 89.

¹⁵ On this point see H. Blom, 'Grotius and Socinianism' in Mulsow and Rohls (eds.), *Socinianism and Arminianism*, 121–48.

of punishment into a right of ownership, viewing it as analogous to the right to exact a debt. In reply, Grotius stressed the distinctiveness of rights of punishment: because they served to benefit the community as a whole, they did not belong to any particular individual.¹⁶ Having established that punishment was necessary where sin had been committed, Grotius went on to show that such punishment could be transferred from the guilty party to an innocent person. He did so through a long discussion of the customs of the nations in which he described how often this practice was seen as legitimate.¹⁷

That rights of punishment existed for the good of the community was one of Grotius' firm beliefs long before he encountered the work of Socius. Indeed, the outlines of Grotius' argument concerning punishment had been formed early in the seventeenth century, when he justified the seizure of the Portugese ship the *Santa Catarina* in his manuscript 'De Jure Praedae' (c.1604–6).¹⁸ In this work he defended the importance of punishment as a means to preserve order in the world; and he insisted that punishment could be undertaken by individuals even in the absence of a settled political framework. This argument was shaped by his concern to defend Dutch colonial interests which, he thought, would best be served by quite extensive intervention in the Indies. Grotius believed that the Dutch West Indies Company (VOC) was right to punish its enemies in war; its commanders should even act (in the words of a modern scholar) as 'global policemen'. As this suggests, Grotius began to draw out a broader argument about coercion in his manuscript.¹⁹ In the 'De Jure Praedae' he argued that punishment like that undertaken by a VOC captain was legitimate because it was directed towards the correction of the offender and the interest of the public as a whole. Indeed, throughout the work Grotius emphasised the strong connection between punishment and the survival of the human race. Even individuals ought to coerce and chastise those who committed injuries or crime, because by their actions these individuals would promote 'the good of the whole human race'.²⁰ In

¹⁶ Rabbie (ed.), *Defensio fidei*, 133–45.

¹⁷ Ibid., 256–71. For a discussion of Grotius' argument, see D. Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible: scholarship, sacrifice, and subjectivity* (Berkeley, 1994), 54–88.

¹⁸ The manuscript has been recently translated as *A Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty* edited by M. Van Ittersum (Indianapolis, 2006).

¹⁹ M. Van Ittersum 'Dating the manuscript of *De Jure Praedae* (1604–1608)' in *History of European Ideas* 2009; also idem., *Profit and Principle: Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories and the Rise of Dutch Power in the East Indies 1595–1615* (Leiden, 2006).

²⁰ Van Ittersum (ed.) *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 139.

this work, as in the *Defensio Fidei*, Grotius emphasised the duty of all to defend the wider community, insisting that those rights which existed to protect the common good, notably the right of punishment, must always be exercised.

By the time Grotius came to discuss punishment in a later work, his celebrated *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (1625), his emphasis had shifted but his central argument had not changed. The new emphasis can be explained by the changing political climate, for Europe was now embroiled in a bitter and continent-wide war, one destined to last until 1648. Grotius himself had also suffered, for he had been exiled from the United Provinces in 1621, after the defeat of the Arminians and their political allies. Acutely aware of the damaging consequences of violence, including violence undertaken as punishment, Grotius was now much more concerned to provide rules and restrictions which might limit warfare. In his long chapter 'On punishment' (book II chapter XX), he continued to stress that punishment served to promote and uphold all human society, but he provided guidelines designed to ensure that punishment would indeed have such beneficial effects. Now, Grotius recognized that when a person was injured he might want to hurt the guilty party, but he claimed that this desire was not in itself conformable to the law of nature. Only where such action would benefit humanity as a whole was punishment justified. Grotius was also willing to allow the remission of punishment in certain circumstances, if this would be more conducive to the general good. This brought a flexibility to his view of punishment which was not to be found in the *Defensio Fidei*. Furthermore, Grotius was much clearer that the right to punish was dependent only on moral and not political superiority, bringing out the claim he had made in 'De Jure Praedae' that this right could belong to individuals. And he tied punishment more closely to the guilt of the individuals, refusing to accept that innocent people could be punished.²¹

Grotius' model of punishment in *De Jure Belli* was designed to serve the human community and to promote its welfare. As such, it could no longer be applied to God—at least, not in a way that would be compatible with orthodox Protestant doctrine. According to the theologians, God punished men in response to their sin; divine justice was not concerned

²¹ Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, ed. R. Tuck, 3 vols, (Indianapolis, 2005), II, esp. 960, 996–8, 1084. On Grotius' understanding of the right to punish see C. Strumpf, *The Grotian theology of international law: Hugo Grotius and the moral foundations of international relations* (Berlin, 2006), 58–63 and G. van Nifterik, 'Grotius and the Origin of the Ruler's Right to Punish' in *Grotiana* 27–28, (2007), 396–415.

with the preservation and improvement of life here on earth in any straightforward sense, but with the maintenance of God's own righteousness and purity. As a result, Grotius had now to accept that when God dealt with human beings, his actions did not always follow the rules appropriate to humans themselves and were often grounded in his 'sovereign Dominion and Jurisdiction over us'. The primary example was his punishment of sinners, which need not be directed to any end beyond itself. God now stood outside the community of sociable human beings, and his rights and powers were not limited by the laws which governed this community. He was free to punish without regard to the welfare of the community as a whole, but he was also free to transfer punishment from one person to another.²² In this way Grotius sought to ensure that his understanding of human punishment did not bring charges of heterodoxy down upon his head, albeit with only limited success.²³

By engaging with Socinus on the field of jurisprudence, Grotius ensured that Socinus' efforts to comprehend God and his relationship to creation in terms of rights and jurisprudence would be continued and further refined. At least in the *Defensio Fidei*, Grotius had implied that God and human beings participated in one single moral community. From the 1620s, however, Grotius began to develop an understanding of natural law which emphasised human sociability and mutual dependence. As he quickly found, God fitted rather awkwardly into such a scheme of rights and laws, for he was a being like no other, enjoying powers and freedom far beyond the capacities of mortals. Moreover, God could not himself be described as sociable, and this quality was central to Grotius' system of rights and laws. In 1625 Grotius decided, therefore, to leave God at the margins of his system of natural law—especially when it came to punishment.²⁴ Among the Socinians, however, it was the effort to incorporate God's seemingly unique properties into a legal scheme which proved extremely productive. There, theological speculation quickly led to unusual conclusions about natural law and natural rights. Nowhere was this more evident than in the work of the greatest of the second-generation Socinians, Johan Crell.

²² Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, II, 957.

²³ Often these charges were also related to Grotius' perceived sympathy with (and concessions to) a pacifist position associated with Socinianism. See e.g. Grotius' letter of 1628 to Willem De Groot in P. C. Molhuysen et al. (eds.) *Briefwisseling van Hugo Grotius* (Gravenhage, 1928–2001), vol. III, 391–2.

²⁴ See Blom, 'Grotius and Socinianism', and, for the same point from a different angle, K. Haakonssen, 'Hugo Grotius and the history of political thought', *Political Theory*, 13, (1985), 250.

III

The Socinian community held Grotius in high esteem and they could not let Grotius' critique of their master go unanswered. Six years after the publication of the *Defensio Fidei* (and after Grotius' troubles had abated somewhat) there appeared a reply.²⁵ It was written by Johan Crell, a German scholar who had felt the pull of Socinian theology while a young student at the Academy of Altdorf near Nuremberg. By 1613 his heterodox beliefs were beginning to arouse suspicions, and he travelled to Rakow to begin a new, but no less academic life. He was soon appointed Rector of the Socinian Academy, and he, like Socinus before him, sought to present the community's beliefs in terms which would render them plausible to an educated (and often lay) European audience. His first task, therefore, was to absolve Socinus from Grotius' charges, and—as far as possible—to win Grotius himself round to the Socinians' cause. Crell certainly met with some success; and Grotius soon came to admire the German scholar's work.²⁶ His strategy, in his *Ad Librum Hugonis Grotii*, was to demonstrate that Grotius' understanding of the atonement was riddled with confusion, with contradictions and ambiguities. Yet Crell also explained that these difficulties could be resolved through greater attention to the meaning of legal terms like right and justice. He wanted to engage with Grotius on his opponent's favoured ground: law and jurisprudence. In so doing, he ensured that his own theological heterodoxy would be defended with some novel ideas about justice, rights and punishment here on earth.

From Crell's work it is evident that he had not wasted his time at Altdorf and had left with a strong grasp of ethics and jurisprudence. His knowledge of mainstream theology was rather more limited, for Altdorf had no theology faculty. Moreover, the Academy had never signed up to the Lutheran Formula of Concord (1577), and this enabled professors to teach there without committing themselves to current Lutheran orthodoxy.²⁷ As a result, religion in Altdorf was quite eclectic, and often the

²⁵ Ever charitable, Crell was unwilling to publish his work while Grotius was in prison. See the preface to the work, entitled *Ad librum Hugonis Grotii, quem de satisfactione Christi adversus Favstvm Socinvm Senensem scripsit, responsio* (Rakow, 1623) printed in J. Crell, *Opera didactica et polemica* (Irenopoli [i.e. Amsterdam], post anno 1656 [i.e. 1666–8]), 1–231.

²⁶ See Grotius' letters to Crellius of 1632–3 in Molhuysen et al. (eds.) *Briefwisseling van Hugo Grotius*, V, 49–51, 146.

²⁷ For Altdorf see W. Mährle, *Academia Norica: Wissenschaft und Bildung an der Nürnberger Hohen Schule in Altdorf (1575–1623)*, (Stuttgart, 2000).

students approached it using the ideas and concepts they had learnt in philosophy or jurisprudence. Certainly they did not have the metaphysical grounding necessary for the academic study of Protestant theology. Perhaps as a result, many of the students found Lutheranism puzzling and unfulfilling, and soon Socinian ideas began to spread in Altdorf.²⁸ When the Altdorf students began to defend and explain the religious ideas which they took from the Socinians, they—and especially Crell—turned to the concepts with which they were familiar, notably those they had learned while studying law. Like Socinus, Crell assumed that God must obey the basic rules of jurisprudence and when analysing the scriptures he turned to legal concepts to help him understand the Christian message.

Crell's arguments all stemmed from one central theological belief which he shared with Socinus: that God's justice did not compel him to exercise his right of punishment. Grotius, he felt, had failed to define justice properly, and this was the root of the Dutch jurist's error. In response, Crell sought rigorously to distinguish the moral concepts of justice or equity from both natural rights and rights created by positive law, insisting that once these distinctions were made, the force of Socinus' argument was undeniable. To make this clear, Crell drew a distinction between the two meanings of 'just'. An action could be described as just, he argued, if it were merely licit or permissible; on the other hand, a just action could be one which 'ought to be done to make things equitable'.²⁹ It was always just in the first sense for God to punish humans, but only in certain circumstances would punishment be just in the second sense. No one denied that God could legitimately punish sinful men, but Crell was trying to refine this statement so that it did not imply that God ought to punish them. In so doing, Crell was stressing the permissive quality of certain ideas of justice, while seeking to detach the concept of a right from the moral notion of rectitude or equity. But Crell also wanted to make clear that punishment did not, in itself, have any positive value. To do this, he argued that punishment was one of the natural rights possessed by all free individuals, and that its existence had nothing to do with any community at all.³⁰ Here Crell made crystal clear the individualistic premises of Socinus' argument, and he did so by severing natural rights from any notion of community or sociability. Indeed, it was his strident rejection of

²⁸ Gustav-Georg Zellner, *Historia Crypto-Socinismi Altorfinae quondam Academiae infesti arcana* (Leipzig, 1729).

²⁹ Crell, *Opera didactica et polemica*, 44.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

Grotius' connection between natural rights, sociability and the common good which set his work apart from his contemporaries.

But Crell had also to tackle head on Grotius' claim that a right of punishment was different from other rights, because it belonged to a superior and existed for the sake of the common good. It was important for Crell's theological argument that he show that this was not the case, that God could use or waive his right of punishment just like any other right because it was not intrinsically connected to his good government of the world. Here Crell made his most striking move by likening God—at least for the purposes of this argument—to a person in a state of natural liberty, rather than a ruler. Rather than see the right of punishment as something intrinsically connected to rulership, Crell described it as a natural right, one which a person in a state of natural liberty would obtain if he were injured. The German Socinian accepted that most people here on earth did not live in such a condition of liberty but were instead subject to rulers; and their natural rights—especially their natural right to punish—had been restricted. Only those people who were not themselves under the power of another had retained their rights of punishment. Because these people were usually rulers, Crell argued, Grotius had mistakenly assumed that the right of punishment stemmed from rulership. Instead, Crell explained, the injured person could punish 'by natural right', as long as he was 'entirely free and subject to no authority', rejecting the notion that rights of punish were tied to rulership.³¹ The injured party could, therefore, renounce this right to punish if he chose—and this, Crell argued, was what God decided to do when men repented.

Crucially, Crell thought that God's position could best be understood by examining the condition of a person in a state of natural liberty, and by analysing how such a person might gain rights of punishment over his fellow men. He was adamant that the rights of men and of rulers in settled societies must not be confused with the rights of men in a condition of natural liberty. To make this clear, Crell began to examine the implications of such a condition of liberty, assuming from the outset that men within it would relate to one another in terms of rights, that injuries could be committed and that if a person were injured he would thereby gain a right to revenge and defend himself. Yet Crell had to ensure that these rights were not moral duties, because he needed to maintain God's freedom to renounce his right of punishment. To this end, as suggested above,

³¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

he consistently rejected any connection between the right of punishment and the common good. Instead, he believed that the right of punishment existed originally for the benefit of the injured person, who would naturally seek his own solace and his own security through punishment.³² The implication was that such a person would not (as Grotius thought) have any natural inclination towards the common good or any natural care for the welfare of others. Of course, Crell thought that rights of punishment should be used so as to benefit the community as a whole, but he insisted that any beneficial consequences of punishment were conceptually distinct from the legitimacy of the right itself. Again, Crell thought Grotius had confused equity and rectitude, both of which could be displayed through the use of rights, with right itself, defined as a power to act licitly. Throughout the argument, Crell was constantly pushing Grotius to divide moral concepts, such as justice and the common good, from natural right. This was important to him because it enabled him to strip God's right of punishing human beings of any moral considerations, and thereby to explain why God might renounce this right.

The source of punishment rights was, for Crell, the injury inflicted by one person on another; as a result God could not justly punish an innocent person. Christ could not have been punished by God, he argued, because punishment presupposes antecedent guilt. He was then left with the problem of explaining Christ's death, which he solved by terming it affliction rather than punishment and tracing it to God's right of absolute lordship over all creation. But Crell stressed that Christ had consented to such suffering, convinced that he would be rewarded for it. Certainly he did not want to imply that God might afflict other human beings in a similar way.³³ A few years later, Crell spelled out more clearly the limits of God's rights over his creatures, showing that some actions would be unjust even for God. Here his basic premise was that God had given free will and liberty to human beings, and from this it followed that humans must be capable of holding rights and suffering injury. In a clear attack upon the concept of predestination, Crell insisted that even God himself respected those rights, and that he would not punish innocent people unless they themselves sinned. The 'liberty and right' which all human beings possess—and which ensures that they cannot be arbitrarily cast into hell—may be a divine gift, but 'once it has been given, we cannot

³² Ibid., 81.

³³ Ibid., 102–5.

be deprived of it unless we sin voluntarily'. Whereas Socinus had simply stressed that all human practices and intuitions proved that it was wrong to punish an innocent person, Crell argued that it involved injury to that person and violated his right. If it was quite unjust to punish anyone until they had themselves sinned, then surely men could be assured that a merciful God would not damn anyone for the sins of Adam. Crell's critique of the doctrine of predestination emphasised that the rights which one free agent had over another would always be limited.

Against Grotius, Crell provided an account of justice and right similar to—but more sophisticated than—the version provided by Socinus. By treating God as an agent in a condition of natural liberty, answerable to no superior, he began to consider just how rights and obligations might arise in these circumstances. Crell's theological argument had, this suggests, enabled him to develop a notion of a natural right which involved no claims at all about any common good, but which still restricted the coercive power of one individual over another. Individuals received and created rights through agreements and through their interactions with other people, but these rights were first and foremost designed to serve their own utility, rather than the community as a whole. Human beings—and God—could and should make agreements which ensured that these rights were used for the benefit of all, but it was important to be clear about which powers stemmed from natural right and which from positive law. Crell was interested in natural right because it helped him to explain why God was able to forgive, while it still provided protection for innocent men and women by ensuring that guilt and punishment went together. When it came to salvation, though, Crell was quite clear that we should strive for equity and rectitude rather than contenting ourselves with what is merely licit.

IV

Theological heterodoxy occasioned some important and unusual reflections upon justice and on natural rights and liberty. By examining the atonement, Socinus, Grotius and Crell came to consider not only the relationship between God and individuals, but also that between individuals themselves here on earth. For God, they thought, must be in the position of an individual with no superior, but who might be expected to hold some moral principles. Their theological commitments encouraged them to think about the natural rights a person might have in this situation—

and the relationship of such natural rights to civil society and to God's commands and practices as revealed by Christ. In particular, their arguments—especially Crell's—enabled them to make a distinction between the natural rights which individuals possess for their own benefit, and the rights and laws which are created when these individuals enter into agreements with each other.

Grotius is often seen as a founding member of a new school of modern natural rights but it should now be evident that the Socinians may also merit inclusion in this illustrious company. Grotius has been singled out because his idea of natural right was both minimal, based on self-preservation, and robust, in that it accorded to individuals the kinds of rights (like punishment) which were usually associated with the state.³⁴ Yet Crell's theological argument enabled—or, perhaps, forced—him to develop a concept of natural right which was even more unusual than that outlined by his Dutch correspondent. For, as we have seen, Crell wanted to show that God could waive his right of punishment and in making his case he likened God to an individual in a state of natural liberty who had full discretion over his rights. Crell portrayed individuals in this condition as agents whose rights existed—and could be legitimately used—solely for their own advantage. In 'De Jure Praedae', Grotius had described man as a creature 'free and under his own right', able to act and to use his possessions for his own purposes.³⁵ But Grotian individuals did not live for themselves alone and they always lay under the duty to preserve the community by punishing malefactors, even before they came together in societies. Crell's individuals had no such obligations, for the German scholar always eschewed any connection between natural right and the common good. Most readers did not take up Crell's arguments; instead, it was the Grotian version of the individual right to punish which appealed to later writers, notably John Locke.³⁶ But Crell's emphasis on the individual, engaged in the pursuit of his own utility and security while endowed with the capacity or right to judge and to punish others when they violated his rights, may well have alerted his readers to the same themes in Grotius' writing.

³⁴ R. Tuck, 'The "modern" theory of natural law', in A. Pagden (ed.), *The languages of political theory in early-modern Europe*, (Cambridge, 1987), 99–119 and idem., *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford, 1999), 84–5.

³⁵ Van Ittersum (ed.) *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 33.

³⁶ Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace*, 82.

Where Grotius and Crell differed was in their understanding of the relationship between the community and the individual. Grotius had a strong sense of the importance of the common good and of the natural sociability of human beings. For the Dutchman was always a patriot, deeply attached to his homeland, and a humanist who thought in terms of community and society. For this reason he could suggest, in the *Defensio Fidei*, that the punishment of one member of a community could be transferred to another, as long as society as a whole would benefit. By 1625 he had drawn back from this idea, maintaining a firmer connection between individual guilt and punishment; he had also made clear his commitment to the diversity of human social arrangements.³⁷ Yet there remained for Grotius a strong sense of community and common life, which he believed was part of true Christianity as well as human nature. And he continued to insist that men could intervene in the affairs of others where this was necessary to secure common preservation.³⁸

Grotius emphasised the human community, but Crell saw human beings primarily as individuals. The German Socinian was strongly opposed to any kind of theology or civil philosophy which treated people in groups, especially when it came to rewards or punishment. He made this clear in his discussion of Christ's satisfaction, where he insisted that God must have the freedom to take the actions of every man and woman into account when he determined their fate. But his analysis of natural liberty was also designed to serve the same end, to show that people were not naturally subject to anyone else. When humans entered into communities they must give their consent (even if tacitly) to the authority which stood over them.³⁹ Crell's ideas here may reflect his own background and his own experiences of the Socinian community at Rakow. This small town was extremely unusual, for a high proportion of its inhabitants—often refugees from other parts of Europe—had made a conscious decision to live there and to submit to its laws and customs. The sense of community at Rakow was created by shared and voluntary attachment to specific aims and ideals, at least as much as by any organic bond of kinship or history. At the same time, the Socinians who had made Rakow their home were

³⁷ Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, I, 262.

³⁸ See Grotius' discussion in *ibid.* esp. pp. 199–207 and his defence of military action against peoples who contravene the principles of natural religion in *ibid.* vol. II, 1021–1052. Tuck brings out the interventionist aspect of Grotius' thought in his own *Rights of War and Peace*, 108.

³⁹ Crell, *Opera didactica et polemica*, 71.

under perpetual threat of persecution, mostly from Catholics who tended to justify their action in terms of a good which was higher than the individual, such as the unity of the Catholic Church. In such circumstances, it is easy to see how a theology which emphasised individual salvation through personal effort, and displayed a marked scepticism towards communal goals, might develop in tandem with more earthly concerns.⁴⁰

Crell's argument had important ecclesiological implications, for his commitment to individual choice and responsibility meant that he was reluctant to grant the magistrate any religious responsibilities. According to him, men come together in settled societies because they are involved in a collective search for security, rather than to fulfil any higher goals or aims. Having made this point in the course of his discussion of the atonement, Crell later returned to it when he sought to defend a broad right of toleration, in which the magistrate was not responsible for the religion of his subjects but only for their earthly safety. In his *Vindiciae pro Religionis Libertate* (MS 1632, printed 1637) Crell urged magistrates to allow religious liberty in their lands; and he insisted that they must maintain such liberty once they have granted it. He emphasised that this would benefit the magistrates themselves, for it would contribute to the peace and stability of their lands. And he reassured them that it was no dereliction of duty to tolerate heretics, for religious belief was a matter for each individual and not for their ruler.⁴¹ Crell's clear restriction of the rights of the civil magistrate in religious matters was extremely unusual when this tract was written, but it would become more common later in the century. Indeed, his short work had remarkable staying power. It was reprinted several times and translated into Dutch (in 1649), English (in 1646) and French (in 1687). Even in 1769 his argument was seen as relevant and that year saw the publication of a revised version of the French translation.⁴²

Although Socinus, Crell and Grotius had discussed theological themes, their unusual and heterodox views enabled and encouraged them to reflect upon more earthly problems. In particular, they considered what it might mean to have a natural right and what the implications of any

⁴⁰ For more on the Polish situation which lay behind this see A. Jobert, *De Luther à Mohila: la Pologne dans la crise de la chrétienté, 1517–1648* (Paris, 1974), 235.

⁴¹ [J. Crellius,] *Iuni Bruti Poloni Vindiciae pro religionis libertate* (Eleutheropolis [Amsterdam], 1637), translated as *A learned and exceeding well-compiled vindication of liberty of religion* ([London], 1646).

⁴² For more the context of the French translation by Charles Le Cène see John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge, 2006), 471–2.

answer would entail for human societies. In so doing, they contributed to a broader debate about how human beings might exchange natural right for civil society—and about the consequences of doing so for religious belief. This debate would shift to a different gear with the contribution of Thomas Hobbes, but the central themes persisted.⁴³ The political dimension to the writings of the Socinians has often been overlooked, for their relevance to questions of civil and political philosophy is not always immediately apparent. And yet it seems clear that their writing—especially that of Crell—should be read not only for its heterodox theology but also for its comments upon natural right and civil society. Indeed, the early modern treatment of these themes cannot be understood unless the importance of ideas developed to defend and explain heterodox religious beliefs is recognised.

The echoes of Socinus' arguments could be heard well beyond the walls of the Basle inn in which he had crossed swords with Covetus. The strong theological convictions of the Italian heresiarch were defended by recourse to political, legal and historical argument, and this strategy was continued not only by his followers but also by Grotius, his most important antagonist. Once theology was discussed using the tools of civil and secular learning, it was easy for ideas and beliefs which originated in heterodox (or even orthodox) Christianity to appear relevant to problems and controversies in other disciplines—including political and civil philosophy. This chapter has described one part of that process, in which heterodox views about the relationship between God and human beings, and between justice and punishment, could encourage a creative approach to the concept of justice here on earth. In re-interpreting the Christian message, the Socinians also began to re-interpret early modern society.

⁴³ See A. Brett, 'The development of the idea of citizens' rights' in Q. Skinner and B. Strath (eds.) *States and Citizens: History, Theory, Prospects* (Cambridge, 2003), 97–112, esp. 104–5.

'THE KINGDOM OF DARKNESS': HOBBS AND HETERODOXY

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Hobbes was, arguably, the fountainhead of intellectual contamination and religious heterodoxy in the second half of the seventeenth century.¹ Although framed by profound theological idiosyncrasy, Hobbes's heterodoxy—it will be argued—was more controversial and dangerous as an ecclesiological or political deviance than as a form of pure conceptual dissent. His thought crimes were ultimately about power rather than propositions. Richard Rorty, in a brief but suggestive essay, provides an appropriate framework for engaging with this dimension of Hobbes's project: as he explained '[...] anticlericalism is a political view, not an epistemological or metaphysical one. It is the view that ecclesiastical institutions, despite all the good they do—despite all the comfort they provide to those in need or in despair—are dangerous to the health of democratic societies'.² Early modern contemporaries were acutely sensitive to this political dimension of heterodoxy.

Henry Hallywell, friend of Cambridge Platonist Henry More, admirer of Cudworth, and editor of the works of George Rust, published in 1681 a learned text under the title of *Melampronoea, or, A discourse of the polity and kingdom of darkness*. Pointing his polemic at Hobbes, his work hoped to deliver readers 'from the Power of the Dark Kingdom, whose very Existence some smatterers in Philosophy have the Confidence to deny'. Certain men, like the recently departed Hobbes, had been sceptical of this 'Kingdom of Darkness', but the work delineated the 'Rebellious Confederacy' of 'a very Potent and Adverse party of Incorporeal Agents'. Writers like Hobbes, 'over-confident Exploders of Immaterial Substances', in disputing the existence of devils, evil Spirits, ghosts, apparitions and witches capable of possessing the bodies and minds of men, had corroded public orthodoxy. Deploying ridicule, 'loud laughter or a supercilious look'

¹ For support for this claim see Jon Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan: the reception of the political and religious ideas of Thomas Hobbes in England, 1640–1700* (Cambridge, 2007), especially 402–403, 416.

² R. Rorty 'Anticlericalism and atheism' in R. Rorty, G. Vattimo *The Future of Religion* (Columbia, 2005), 32.

impious wits dismissed such accounts as ‘the delusions of a distempered Imagination, and owed all their Being and Reality to the dreams and fancies of melancholick persons’. Hallywell’s book evidenced (with witness and testimony from scripture, nature and reason) ‘the possibility of a Confederation between Men and wicked Daemons’ to answer the objections of those that claimed witchcraft was ‘mere Fiction and Imposture, and a ridiculous piece of non-sence’. To suggest that such beliefs existed only ‘in mens Brains and Imaginations, than any where else in the Universe’ was to cast contempt on the scriptures and ‘to make Religion a meer cheat and delusion’. While the ‘Atheistical Foppe’, influenced by Hobbes, invoked the language of delusion, Hallywell insisted that the power of the ‘Kingdom of Darkness’ was an indisputable ‘matter of fact’.³

Hobbes, of course, had attempted in his *Leviathan* (1651) to suggest the contrary: the ‘kingdom of darkness’ was not only delusional, but was (more significantly) the main political instrument of universally corrupt ecclesiastical institutions. The persistence of such (to Hobbes’s mind) ‘superstitions’ into the eighteenth century is testimony to the enduring power of magical understandings of popular religion. The reinforcement of such accounts of a spirit world—against the threat of Hobbist materialism—was evident even in the most everyday forms of literature. So, for example, Nathaniel Crouch, writer of popular miscellanies and ‘entertainments’, saw an opportunity to make money in publishing his *The kingdom of darkness: or the history of daemons, spectres, witches, apparitions, possessions, disturbances, and other wonderful and supernatural delusions, mischievous feats, and malicious impostures of the Devil* in 1688. The persistence of these world views is evidenced in the fact that the work reached its fourth edition in 1728. Like Hallywell’s work it was as much a response to contemporary ‘Athiests and Sadducees’ as a defence of the ‘Being of Spirits’. Countering claims that such accounts were either fabulous stories or attributable to natural causes (i.e. not diabolical possession, but simply mental illness), Crouch produced a lengthy collection of ‘authentick records, real attestations, and evidences of undoubted verity’ that established the operation of the devil in the world.⁴ The existence of such works

³ *Melampronea, or, A discourse of the polity and kingdom of darkness together with a solution of the chieftest objections brought against the being of witches* (1681), 3, 65, 75.

⁴ The subtitle reads, *Containing near fourscore memorable relations, forreign and domestick, both antient and modern. Collected from authentick records, real attestations, credible evidences, and asserted by authors of undoubted verity. Together with a preface obviating the common objections and allegations of the sadduces and athiests of the age, who deny the*

casts considerable doubt on the success of Hobbes's heterodox ambitions against the power of irrational beliefs in the world of politics. The bulk and hostility of such works does however confirm the radical and early nature of Hobbes's contribution to 'enlightenment' discourses against the 'kingdom of darkness'.⁵

That the seventeenth century was an age of heterodoxy and dissent is uncontested.⁶ What is less clear is whether this distinguished it from any other age; and indeed whether particular heterodoxies induced any profound intellectual or cultural consequence in the broader world of ideas, belief and social practices.⁷ The concrete diversity of post-reformation religious belief was one of the evident consequences of the fracturing of the traditional Catholic *ecumene* in the sixteenth century. Across Europe, as many historians have established, there were teeming manifestations of theological confessions constructing new doctrinal accounts and understandings of, for example, the identity and status of Christ, of the operation of human will, the capacities and limitations of reason, and of the power of God. Some of this diversity was the product of communal effort and practice; some of it, the outcomes of the insight, imaginations and idiosyncracies of individuals.

In an age which firmly bracketed theological commitment with political security, the default position for most thinkers argued for a precise co-incidence between truth, order and peace. In this understanding, ideas were intimately bound in with the institutions that created them: any idea, then, that floated free from authorised institutional foundations

being of spirits, witches, &c. With pictures of several memorable accidents. By R.B. Licensed and entred according to order. (London, 1688); further editions in 1689; 1705; 1728. See R. Mayer, 'Nathaniel Crouch, bookseller and historian: popular historiography and cultural power in late seventeenth-century England', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 27 (1993–4), 391–420; see M. C. W. Hunter, 'New light on the 'Drummer of Tedworth': conflicting narratives of witchcraft in Restoration England', *Historical Research*, 78 (2005), 311–53. For Hobbes's involvement in such delusion see S. Schaffer, 'Piety, physic and prodigious abstinence' in O. Grell, A. Cunningham, (eds.), *Religio medici: medicine and religion in seventeenth-century England* (Aldershot, 1996), 171–203.

⁵ This develops the arguments sketched in J. A. I. Champion, 'How to Read Hobbes: Independent, Heretic, Political Scientist, Absolutist? A Review of Some Recent Works on Hobbes', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 11 (2007), 87–98.

⁶ See J. Brooke and I. Maclean (eds.) *Heterodoxy in early modern science and religion* (Oxford, 2005). For the English context see J. A. I. Champion '“The forceful, full, energetic, fearless expression of heretical thoughts”: Rethinking clandestine literature and the European reading public, 1680–1730' *La lettre clandestine*, 17 (2009), 131–156.

⁷ Some of these broader themes of the relationship between 'abnormal' thinking and social order can be explored in M. Foucault *Society must be defended* (London, 2003) and *Abnormal* (London, 2003).

was regarded as a threat to those structures.⁸ In a culture which posited a necessary connection between the divine and the natural, between political order and social hierarchy, and between authority and obedience, any break with the traditional worldview was subversive. One of the powerful stories about this process might describe how the early modern state eventually acclimatised itself to the existence of heterodoxy within its boundaries by the painful and contested development of the various theories of toleration evident in the period. The continuing anxiety about the impossibility of a political society operating without reference to an underpinning deontology suggests that it is not clear when precisely the state became comfortable enough with managing a society composed of a diversity of communal values. The later seventeenth century, as the brutality of the wars of religion was constrained, saw the 'state' begin to assume its modern managerial and 'liberal' form.⁹ Locke is the central character in this story, resolutely avoiding reference to theological matters in the *Two treatises* in order to make a case for toleration of forms of Christian diversity in the *Letters on toleration*. It is important to note that even Locke excluded 'atheists' from toleration upon grounds of political stability: the horrified reaction to Bayle's suggestion of the viability of a society of atheists confirms the persistence of these assumptions about the core political function of Christian commitments.¹⁰

This contribution will not discuss conceptual or theological definitions of heterodoxy (was for example, heterodoxy the manifestation of innovations in epistemological method or philosophical innovation?), or labour to construct a taxonomy of heterodox belief. This not to dismiss or belittle those concerns—instead the focus will be on how Hobbes and his critics engaged with the problem of heterodoxy and its political consequences.

⁸ See for the process of enlightenment critique which challenged this system, M. Foucault *The politics of truth* (Los Angeles, 2007).

⁹ For a powerful review of the issues see M. Walzer *On toleration* (Yale, 1997). See also J. G. A. Pocock 'Machiavelli and the rethinking of history' *Il pensiero politico* 2 (1994), 215–230.

¹⁰ See John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Enlightenment culture* (Cambridge, 2007). For a historically informed contemporary reflection on this dimension see M. Nussbaum, *Liberty of Conscience: In Defence of America's Tradition of Religious Equality* (New York, 2008). On Bayle and atheism see John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2005) 216–225. On Bayle in England see J. A. I. Champion 'Most truly a protestant': reading Bayle in England, 1698–1722' in A. McKenna, G. Paganini (eds.) *Pierre Bayle dans la republique des lettres. Religion, critique, Philosophie* (Paris, 2004), 503–526; and idem 'Bayle in the English Enlightenment' in W. Van Bunge, H. Bots (eds.) *Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), le philosophe de Rotterdam: Philosophy, religion and reception* (Leiden, 2008), 175–196.

How the state positioned itself against the causes and consequences of a variety of perceived heterodoxies remained an issue after 1500, as the claims of obedience were ranged against those of the different claims of rights of free expression and duties of conscience. One might plausibly argue that the need to address the practical consequences of heterodox systems of belief drove the development of resistance theories and ensured that political thought would struggle with the relationship between sovereignty and conscience. Which set of values trumped which, and in what circumstances, was determined by a complex combination of confessional commitments rather than by the outcome of purely philosophical judgement. The dominant political ideologies, despite constructing ingenious languages to respond to the changing contexts of urban life, national identities and sectarian diversity, all assumed a common core of divine truth. For these discourses the point of political life was to construct the conditions of civil peace; but the point of such civil peace was the achievement of Godly rule and thereby communal salvation.¹¹ These fundamental religious commitments ensured, then, that ecclesiology was the primary language of order. Establishing the correct relationship between State and Church—not between the state and a variety of churches—was essential. The most powerful and radical mind to address and (at least in his view) to resolve this problem was Thomas Hobbes.

The important tipping point for the relationship between ideas of heterodoxy and political thinking (arguably, a point of no return) in the period was the case developed and extended by Thomas Hobbes in and after 1651. In what follows, I want to sketch an argument that Hobbes was primarily sensitive to, and concerned to resolve, the problem of religious heterodoxy for matters of civil peace. The question of the extent and nature of Hobbes's undoubted personal heterodoxy can be put to one side, although it has engendered (and continues to engender) a substantial and contested historiography. Certainly, in his public writings, he was self-conscious that the ideas he advanced, and the way they were articulated and defended, produced unusually difficult arguments for many contemporaries. His use of scripture—the most powerful intellectual resource—was particularly controversial, but central to his argument. As he remarked: 'That which perhaps may most offend, are certain Texts of Holy Scripture, alledged by

¹¹ See B. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith. Religious conflict and the practice of toleration in early modern Europe* (Harvard, 2007).

me to other purpose than ordinarily they use to be by others. But I have done it with due submission, and also (in order to my Subject) necessarily; for they are the Outworks of the Enemy, from whence they impugn the Civill Power'.¹²

The foundation of Hobbes's arguments (and arguably it is possible to see his historical account of the relationship between religion and politics underpinning the anticlericalism of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century) was the assumption that religion is a natural, powerful and therefore potentially subversive human and civil phenomena. As Pettit has recently outlined, the root of Hobbes's innovation lay in his conception of the nature of language: 'human minds were made by words'.¹³ Language, as an invented technology, transformed the active capacity of the natural mind to make sense of the world. With language the human mind was capable of exploring and reflecting upon non-particular and non-specific aspects of life. The invention and development of language created the possibilities of a mind capable of grasping generality and category which were more effective ways of negotiating the world. The dark side of this process was that humans were subsequently capable of generating and denoting anxiety about the future and noting 'difference' between each other. Words had effects on desires: the 'warping of human belief' was one negative consequence of this aspect of the material mind. Pettit notes (but explicitly does not set out to explore) that words led 'people to profess parroted beliefs that they do not understand; to snare themselves in confused and incoherent commitments; and to let doctrines diversify and generate conflict'.¹⁴

As Hobbes understood it, the combination of the material framework of the human mind with what might be called an epistemological state of nature, driven by the added self-interest of clever men (usually labelled 'unpleasing priests') meant that civil peace was constantly threatened by latent heterodoxy. Where the demands of stable sovereignty called for obligation to one established order, individual 'fear' led by 'conscience' created religious subversion. Importantly in these arguments, Hobbes stigmatised both mainstream Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrines as politically unhelpful. For Hobbes, heterodoxy was a problem, not because of the implicit intellectual content of a belief, but because such

¹² T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (ed.) R. Tuck, (Cambridge, 1991), 3.

¹³ P. Pettit, *Made with words. Hobbes on Language, mind and politics* (Princeton, 2008), 2.

¹⁴ Pettit, *Made with Words*, 5.

ideas motivated men to political dissent in order to protect their misperceptions of salvation. The claims of theology—and more significantly of theologians (speakers of God's words)—were confused and contested in Hobbes's understanding. Clergymen were not independently authorised to personate or represent God—neither could they empower their words to enforce obligation. Pettit importantly notes the distinction between the *intemporal* and *interpersonal* use of language in the theological context. Commonly individuals used words in an intemporal manner, as marks to refer to events, things or aspects of the world; language was also used in an interpersonal way when an individual told another something about the way they think. Theologians confused these categories in claiming that their words necessarily connected with God's truth, rather than being expressions of their own minds. Hobbes's project was to expose this confusion and to disentangle the claims. Reasoning with words was a meta-linguistic activity rather than a direct commentary on the world: given the social dimension of language formation—it was (to Hobbes's mind) possible to make *a priori* assertions about the demonstrable truth of statements precisely because human minds made the words of public discourse and therefore defined the criteria of accurate and rational usage. This held obvious implications for theology—or what Hobbes called 'names that signify nothing'.¹⁵

One of the most significant and, for the development of theories of society, pivotal insights Hobbes established in *Leviathan* was that the belief systems of individuals and institutions (both civil and sacred) were conventional. Hobbes exposed the fatal flaw in contemporary political culture premised, as it was, on an Aristotelian commitment to taking incorporeal ideas for real substance. This established that the emotive power of ideas rested upon their claim to be divine (true) while showing that the intellectual content of those beliefs was derived from human agency rather than supernatural sources. Language, the institution which distinguished man from beast, was thus a foundation of social power. Hobbes's project exposed the social and cultural mechanics of what Daniel Dennett has neatly recently labelled 'belief in belief'.¹⁶ As he pointed out, deploying (in a way which must have been irritating to clerical readers) a convenient scriptural passage *Romans* 10.17 'Faith comes by hearing'. It was no accident that the sources of contemporary political crises lay in dangerous

¹⁵ This extrapolates from Pettit, *Made with Words*, 35, 42–43, 49, 63, 91.

¹⁶ D. Dennett, *Breaking the spell* (London, 2006), especially 200–248.

collective passions unleashed by clergymen who, by disseminating competing Biblical interpretations, provoked the catastrophic consequences of the British civil wars.¹⁷

This broader ambition of Hobbes's project was intended to disconnect traditional theological ideas and belief from authoritative public institutions. Hobbes was meticulous in his use of words; his careful categorical distinctions between 'opinion', 'belief' and 'knowledge' outlined the framework of a fundamentally political reading of epistemology. What Hobbes had exposed in this work was of ground-breaking importance: the recognition that all beliefs (including Christian theology) were conventional was more than an epistemological claim. More precisely the insight that ideas were generated by men and institutions under the banner of truth for their own advantage had profound political implications. Because such ideas were believed to be the 'truth' by other men, their articulation and public expression accrued public authority to the speakers. This epistemological insight was potentially transformative of the way religious ideas were understood to operate by contemporaries. One immediate consequence of this—and one that Hobbes pursued most explicitly in his post-Restoration writings—was that if expressions of religious truth were essentially ideological, then it would be possible by careful reading and criticism to expose the history of such false beliefs. Critical analysis of the historical circumstances of ecclesiastical institutions made it possible to establish how 'popery' and priestcraft had corrupted the history of civil societies. Indeed Hobbes's suppressed *Behemoth* was a set piece of analysis which showed how the clericalism of the different Protestant confessions had destroyed the Stuart monarchy. Manuscript copies of Hobbes's posthumously published *A brief historical narration concerning heresie* executed the same sort of historical analysis, connecting self-interested philosophical ideas to specific bodies of men within the early Church.¹⁸ This historical mode of enquiry was a legacy from Hobbes to his radical readers after 1680.

Much has been written about the core political themes of *Leviathan*. Hobbes's work deployed visual, moral and metaphorical strategies to develop

¹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 43, pp. 405–406.

¹⁸ L. Borot, 'Hobbes's *Behemoth*', in G. A. J. Rogers, Tom Sorell, (eds.), *Hobbes and history* (London, 2000), 137–46; P. Seaward '“Chief ways of God”: form and meaning in the *Behemoth* of Thomas Hobbes'. *Filozofski vestnik* 2 (2003), 169–188; J. A. I. Champion, 'An Historical Narration Concerning Heresie: Thomas Hobbes, Thomas Barlow, and the Restoration debate over “heresy”'. In D. Loewenstein, J. Marshall (eds.), *Heresy, literature, and politics in early modern English culture* (Cambridge, 2006), 221–53.

a critique of contemporary Aristotelianisms as well as his own innovative understanding of the 'natural condition' of mankind. His account of the nature of man and the 'commonwealth' revised core propositions of commonplace political philosophy—on authorisation and representation, on glory, on the right to punish. The second half of *Leviathan* concentrated on more explicitly controversial and heterodox themes: covenant theology, divine omnipotence and necessity, soteriology, and toleration. Here, as Paganini has established, Hobbes offered a powerful critique of essences. As Jon Parkin has demonstrated, the reception of Hobbes's ideas amongst his immediate (Anglican and Presbyterian) contemporaries and subsequent readers shows how keenly felt were the controversial implications of these theological positions. In the half century or so up until the 1700s, Hobbes's political and religious writings provided intellectual resources and arguments which many opponents were forced not only to engage with, but to even use for their own purposes. Similarly, Jackson has shown how the debate between the Laudian Bishop John Bramhall and Hobbes over the nature of free will can be mapped onto a complex network of patrons and noble counsellors. Much of the theological dispute was driven by Hobbes's hostility to Bramhall's role as the strong arm of Laud's Episcopal policy in Ireland. This debate was more than simply a confrontation between Arminian churchman and determinist Hobbes over the nature of the will—it was a dispute about the locus of 'authority' and the status of 'ministerial power'. The consequences of such heterodoxy also took the form of a political battle for the soul of Charles II. In taking on Bramhall, Hobbes was doing more than simply disputing the philosophical underpinnings of (in his view) a faulty theological doctrine, he was, in effect, countering a powerful and influential clerical figure at the centre of the exiled Royalist court.

There has been considerable and serious reconsideration of the commonplaces used to characterise Hobbes's identity and philosophical significance. A variety of labels, it seems, have been and still are attached to his writing(s), political and religious objectives and intellectual disposition: 'absolutist', 'royalist', 'de facto' theorist, heretic, blasphemer, tolerationist, atheist, epicurean—the list is lengthy, controversial and oftentimes contradictory. The various hostile responses to Hobbes's ideas were more often provoked by the implications and consequences of his doctrines than they were responses to any explicit written statements.¹⁹ It seems then, that both the form and the content of his writings provoked controversial

¹⁹ Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan*, 152.

rejoinders: this complexity was determined, it could be argued, by Hobbes's ambiguous position in relation to commonplace assumptions about the importance of religious orthodoxy to political stability. Hobbes both recognised the significance of claims to religious truth for establishing civil peace and denied any transcendence to such claims.²⁰

Hobbes's project, reflecting the nature of his times, had both political and religious objectives. Arguably, one of the profound consequences of the political and religious crisis of the 1640s and 1650s, most anxiously noted by Anglican Royalists and Presbyterian apologists, was an anti-clerical discourse concerned to challenge *de jure divino* jurisdiction and authority. For Hobbes's contemporaries, theorising about the nature of civil sovereignty necessarily implied adopting an ecclesiological position. In a world where commonplace political theology (underpinned by the injunctions of *Romans* 13) was dominant, detaching questions about the power of the civil order from its relationship to religious authority was uncommon, if not impossible. As articulated in its most radical form by Thomas Hobbes, the undertow of this mainstream Erastianism eventually inundated the claims of the Church to be the main focus for the organisation of public religion. By defending an understanding of political power without reference to an immanent divinity, Hobbes (by default) reduced the function of the Church to a pedagogic minimum, removing its role as an essential channel of sacramental grace. Irritatingly to many more orthodox Christian contemporaries, Hobbes claimed to derive his positions from scriptural sources: Christ's statement 'my kingdom is not of this world' (*John* 18) was the cornerstone of his account of a public civil religion where questions of faith, doctrine and liturgy were contingent on the sovereign's will and judgement.²¹

On the question of his own interpretative competence, Hobbes was very clear. Answering Bishop Bramhall's claims that he simply misunderstood scriptural truth, Hobbes scathingly retorted: 'What has the Bishop

²⁰ Mark Lilla has recently claimed that Hobbes (in this regard) sits on the cusp of modernity. As the 'greatest explorer' of the political function of superstition, Lilla asserts, Hobbes destroyed 'the entire tradition of Christian political theology', decisively changing the course of Western political discourse. While it is not clear that Hobbes's project involved constructing 'modernity', Lilla is perceptive in noting the significance of Hobbes's disenchanting worldview. Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 75–76, 88.

²¹ See P. Springborg (ed.), *Companion to Leviathan* (Cambridge, 2007), 301; see also for the later manifestation of this, J. A. I. Champion, '“My Kingdom is not of this world”: the politics of religion after the Revolution'. In N. Tyacke, (ed.), *The English Revolution c.1590–1720: politics, religion and communities* (Manchester, 2007), 185–202.

to do with what God says to me when I read the Scriptures, more than I have to do with what God says to him when he reads them?'. It was quite evident, despite Bramhall's insistence that 'I am better qualified', that Hobbes denied any form of special expertise or authority transmitted via apostolic succession, inner light or tradition from Christ to any contemporary clergyman (Papist, Laudian, Puritan or prophet).²² But the claim of a Protestant warrant for his approach to biblical interpretation failed to convince the vast majority of his readers. As George Lawson insisted, Hobbes's use of scripture was necessarily ungodly since '[he] doth not conform his notions to Scripture, but wrests it, and makes it to speak that which God never intends'.²³

As Hobbes was (perhaps) the first to point out, 'Christian men do not know, but only believe the Scripture to be the word of God'.²⁴ This issue has generated considerable historiographical debate in particular in regard to the scriptural underpinnings of Hobbes's political theory. Greg Foster's insight that Hobbes's use and treatment of scripture was out of kilter with commonplace Protestant (and indeed Christian) expectation is a significant one.²⁵ Chapter 33 of *Leviathan* raised fundamental and difficult issues about the prophetic origins and nature of revelation, the textual inerrancy of both Old and New Testaments, and the historical process of canon formation which posed unavoidable challenges to contemporary Protestant expectations and practices. Repeatedly, Hobbes's opponents drew attention to what they believed was his misuse and misunderstanding of scripture. The biblical criticism of men like Fisher, Spinoza and Simon was perhaps more firmly rooted in erudition, but Hobbes's achievement was to draw out the political implications of this scholarship in a deliberately contentious way.²⁶ The general distinction between 'knowledge' and

²² N. D. Jackson, *Hobbes, Bramhall and the politics of liberty and necessity: a quarrel of the Civil Wars and Interregnum* (Cambridge, 2007), 232.

²³ Parkin, *Taming of Leviathan*, 190.

²⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 43, p. 406.

²⁵ The best recent discussion is J. R. Collins 'Interpreting Thomas Hobbes in competing contexts' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 70 (2009), 165–180, but see also, G. Forster, 'Divine Law and Human Law in Hobbes's *Leviathan*'. *History of Political Thought*, 24 (2003), 189–217. For an unconvincing reply which misunderstands the purchase of Hobbes's engagement with scripture, see A. P. Martinich, S. Vaughan, D. L. Williams, 'Hobbes's Religion and Political Philosophy: A Reply to Greg Forster'. *History of Political Thought*, 29 (2008), 49–64. J. A. I. Champion 'Hobbes and biblical criticism: some preliminary remarks' *Institut d'Histoire de la Reformation Bulletin Annuel XXI* (2009–10) 53–72.

²⁶ See J. A. I. Champion, 'Apocrypha canon and criticism from Samuel Fisher to John Toland, 1650–1718'. in Allison P. Coudert, et al. (ed.), *Judaeo-Christian intellectual culture in the seventeenth century: a celebration of the Library of Narcissus Marsh (1638–1713)* (Dordrecht, 1999), 91–117; idem "Acceptable to inquisitive men": some Simonian contexts for

'belief' was one which Hobbes used (brutally) to deny leverage to assertions of religious truth in the arena of public authority. Contemporary Christians, especially the Protestant variety, of course disputed the application of the distinction to Scripture—the Book of Scripture was not text and words, but inspired and inerrant revelation suitable for interpretation only by those with the correct form of expertise.²⁷

The Presbyterian booksellers behind *A beacon set on fire* (1652) outlined a detailed rebuttal of passages of 'blasphemous stuff', identifying Hobbes's claim that 'all they to whom God hath not supernaturally revealed the Scriptures, are not obliged to obey them by any other Authority than that of the Commonwealth residing in the sovereign, who only hath the Legislative power: p. 201' as spectacularly horrid. Richard Baxter too, put his finger on the same core principle of impiety, 'ergo Xt Doth but teach and Princes command . . . ergo scripture is no further a law (saith Hobbs) than sovereigns so make it: nor ministers have any power of governing, or commanding, Nor Christ any kingdome now on earth; but only in preparing men by Doctrin for one hereafter'. Hobbes was happy to acknowledge the reality (if not the veracity) of this assertion. Since it was highly unlikely that God had ever revealed himself to any normal individual, it was therefore the case, 'that the means of making them believe which God is pleased to afford men ordinarily, is according to the way of nature, that is to say from their teachers'.²⁸ For Hobbes this meant, necessarily, that the beliefs produced by the institutions of organised religion were matters of absolute political concern. As he put it pithily, in the infamous Chapter 12 'on religion', 'For seeing all formed Religion, is founded at first, upon the faith which a multitude hath in some one person, whom they believe not only to be a wise man, and to labour to procure their happiness, but also to be a holy man, to whom God himselfe vouchsafeth to declare his will supernaturally'.²⁹ Traditional religious values were truth claims, which had historically embodied, defended and promoted the self interest of clerical elites (whether one examined the history of the Hebrew commonwealth of the Old Testament, or reviewed the evidence of the 'late' civil wars in

Newton's Biblical criticism, 1680–1692'. in J. E. Force and R. H. Popkin, (eds.) *Newton and religion: context, nature, and influence* (Dordrecht, 1999), 77–96.

²⁷ J. A. I. Champion, '“Directions for the profitable reading of the Holy Scriptures”: biblical criticism, clerical learning and lay readers, c. 1650–1720'. In A. Hessayon and N. Keene, (eds.), *Scripture and scholarship in early modern England* (Aldershot, 2006).

²⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 43, pp. 324/406.

²⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 12, p. 58.

the British Isles). As Parkin has noted, Hobbes proposed a 'ruthless exclusion of any form of independent spiritual authority'.³⁰

Exposing to public view the way in which all communal beliefs and values were created and sustained by self-interested minorities was Hobbes's greatest achievement, and a legacy both appreciated and exploited by the writers of the later radical enlightenment. As Edwin Curley has concisely insisted, Hobbes was a 'card carrying member of the radical enlightenment'.³¹ Recently Richard Tuck has suggested that in contesting the meaning of the word 'religion' (in the same way as he did with the meaning of words like 'justice' and 'man') Hobbes understood most of the elements of public religion to be 'oblations not propositions'.³² The intention behind this was, by securing a space for the freedom of thought within a potentially authoritarian political system, to protect the individual mind from personal domination (especially in terms of the moral values that individuals might adopt). Such a position attracted considerable and sustained opprobrium from a wide range of hostile authors—many of them keen and intent on ruining Hobbes's reputation by casting aspersions against his religious integrity. This hostility—beyond the scare mongering of the charge of atheism—focussed on specific doctrinal deviance rather than engaging head on with Hobbes's assault on the clericalist abuse of revelation.

A fundamental dislike of name calling and of imprecise vocabulary was of course at the root of Hobbes's intellectual temperament. Indeed, the misuse of words, he argued, caused most political problems—words misapplied, misunderstood and misused were a foundational cause of problems of civil order. Even more so, he hated being subjected to personal vilification, especially by Godly men who ought to have known better. Once provoked, as he made very clear, he was capable of deploying the sharp edge of his tongue: responding to unwarranted provocation from two Oxford critics he dismissed them in no uncertain terms, 'So go your wayes, you uncivill Ecclesiastiques, Inhumane Divines, Dedoctors of Morality, Unafinous Colleagues, Egregious pair of Issachars, most wretched *Vindices* and *Indices Academiæ*; and remember Vespasians Law, that it is uncivill to give ill language first, but civill and lawfull to return it'.³³ This

³⁰ A beacon p. 14; Parkin, *Taming of Leviathan*, pp. 116–117.

³¹ Springborg, *Companion to Leviathan*, p. 326.

³² Richard Tuck, 'Hobbes and Christianity', History of Political Thought Research Seminar *Institute of Historical Research* 2007, citing 'On Thomas White'.

³³ Hobbes, *Six Lessons* (1656), p. 63.

thread—that the ‘uncivill’ conduct of clergymen was a source of political discontent—runs through the warp and weave of Hobbes’s writings after 1651. Often the undertow from the ambition of neutralising such behaviour dragged Hobbes into dangerous and hostile waters in which he nonetheless persisted in swimming in the last third of his life.

To claim that the last three decades of Hobbes’s life were dominated by the consequences of the publication of *Leviathan* in 1651 is, in some measure, platitudinous. As John Rogers has noted Hobbes was possibly ‘the most maligned philosopher of all time’.³⁴ Often in the historiography, 1651 has been regarded as a climacteric—the moment when Hobbes intervened most dramatically on the stage of national politics and intellectual debate. Jeffrey Collins has recently reinforced this view in arguing that Hobbes’s project was much closer to the ambitions of Independent and Commonwealth affinities within the Protectorate.³⁵ One of the consequences of this emphasis on the intellectual status and contextual political significance of *Leviathan* has been to approach the rest of Hobbes’s contributions as ‘afterlife’. The ferocity of this reception (it is assumed) put Hobbes on the back foot, both in terms of defending his intellectual position, but also (more significantly) in the personal urgency of needing to protect his own life from the persecutory intentions of a variety of interregnum and (more urgently) post-Restoration Churchmen.

The trope of ‘the hunting’ of heterodoxy in *Leviathan*, first promoted by Samuel Mintz (building explicitly on the language and hostile disposition of the contemporary critical response) has set the tone for exploring Hobbes’s post-1651 life, as one which was haunted by anxiety and intellectually defensive.³⁶ According to this tradition, Hobbes, confronted with the massed (and potentially murderous) ranks of clerical opponents, set about desperately covering his tracks by carefully re-editing key works, deploying ambiguity, prevarication and intellectual sleights of hand, while clinging to his aristocratic patrons to preserve him from capture. Here the powerful images contained in John Aubrey’s life—of Hobbes burning heterodox papers, fearful of the Bishops, clinging to his noble protectors—have also shaped historical perceptions of (especially the post-Restoration) Hobbesian discourses. The implication of this biographical narrative is that since

³⁴ Springborg, *Companion to Leviathan*, 413.

³⁵ J. R. Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes*, (Oxford, 2005).

³⁶ S. I. Mintz, *The hunting of Leviathan: seventeenth-century reactions to the materialism and moral philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1962). See also G. A. J. Rogers (ed.), *Leviathan: contemporary responses to the political theory of Thomas Hobbes* (Bristol, 1995).

Hobbes composed *Leviathan* as a response to the civil wars (and indeed as he put it, 'The cause of my writing that book, was the consideration of what the Ministers before, and in the beginning of the Civill War, by their preaching and writing did contribute thereunto'), somehow after the experimental period of the interregnum was exchanged for the return of monarchical government he must have been wrong-footed.³⁷ Caught unawares by changing circumstances, Hobbes simply attempted in his later works to justify the legitimacy (and thereby the orthodoxy—or at the very least the non-heterodoxy) of a retrospective position.

One historiographical consequence of this has been to focus attention on the earlier and middle period of his work. So, for example, considerable scholarly effort has been devoted to establishing how the thinking embodied in *De Cive* connects to the revised positions of *Leviathan*. More recently the writings of the post-Restoration period have been used as a key to unlock the latent heterodoxy of the major texts. Clearly there is some commonsense in this approach—the underpinning system and structure of Hobbes's thought suggests that there are continuities of discourse and intellectual commitment. The example of *Leviathan* itself is a pertinent one: as Malcolm and others have shown it was reprinted and redeployed in the 1660s and 1670s despite legal prohibition and authorial claims of regret.³⁸ Whether it is possible to confirm Hobbes's involvement in the clandestine printings, it seems unlikely that Crooke and company proceeded without some encouragement. What is indisputable is that the 1668 Latin translation was a deliberate project: ongoing research collating the two textual states suggests that the Restoration text was indeed a restatement and sharpening of commitment rather than any act of sincere repentance. As Wright and Curley argue, the material of the 'Appendix', while rhetorically configured as revisionist correction, in fact promulgated in print controversial positions which had been circulating in scribal form amongst reasonably extensive circles since the late 1660s.³⁹

Jon Parkin has provided extensive evidence to insist that the reception of Hobbes's writings—in particular *Leviathan*—was spectacular, hostile and persistent after 1660. The huge range of works—learned, dramatic and popular—kept the malign 'reputation' of Hobbes's ideas in the public mind. This reception was concerned to subdue a clear and present danger:

³⁷ Hobbes, *Six Lessons*, p. 56.

³⁸ N. Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 336–382.

³⁹ See E. Curley, 'Hobbes and the cause of religious toleration'; G. Wright, 'The 1668 Appendix and Hobbes theological project' in Springborg, *Companion to Leviathan*; See also G. Wright, *Religion, Politics and Thomas Hobbes* (Dordrecht, 2006).

somehow contemporaries recognised that the ideas still had not only pertinence and vitality, but also leverage over existing political possibilities and circumstances. The much cited comment of Pepys about the scarcity of copies of *Leviathan* supposedly suppressed by the Bishops has perhaps led to an underplaying of the pertinence of Hobbes's project to the political concerns of the first two decades after the Restoration.⁴⁰ Hobbes did not retire from the fray: indeed he remained uncomfortably close to the centres of power. A chance encounter early in 1660 saw Charles II's coach pass through the Strand where the king 'espied' Hobbes standing at the gate of Little Salisbury House. The monarch 'put off his hat very kindly to him, and asked him how he did'. Subsequently while sitting for a portrait he was so 'diverted by Mr Hobbes pleasant discourse' that 'order was given that he should have free access to his majesty, who always much delighted in his wit and smart repartees'.⁴¹ Jackson's suggestion that the battle between Bramhall and Hobbes in the 1650s was in some sense a battle for the soul of Charles II seems plausible and should allow some speculation about the nature of their relationship in the more convivial circumstances of the Restoration. Certainly after 1660, Hobbes's position in the political elite allowed him access to some of the most powerful men in national politics: the evidence of his correspondence and archive suggests he continued to target his works at this influential audience. Monarchs and secretaries of state were amongst those to whom he dedicated works—and where it was not possible to gain support for print publications he had luxury copies of the works prepared for individual presentations as well as perhaps more sturdy editions prepared for paying readers to use for scribal copies in the Green Dragon Bookshop.

It may be wise then, to assume that this substantial volume of writing after 1651 was related to its own context rather than simply an exercise in retrospective defence. That even the King was anxious about the prospect of allowing Hobbes to publish *Behemoth* for fear of provoking the episcopacy (perhaps) provides an hint of justification for the urgency of a war against 'ghostly authority' to be waged after the 1660s. If even the monarch was fearful of the disruptive authority of the Church, arguably Hobbes's polemic against 'unpleasing priests' was timely. The sheer volume of the counter-Hobbes writings exposes the intensity of such anxiety amongst

⁴⁰ 'it being a book the Bishops will not let be printed again' (3rd Sept. 1668).

⁴¹ See John Aubrey *Brief lives: chiefly of contemporaries set down by John Aubrey, between the years 1669 and 1696*, edited by Andrew Clark, (Oxford, 1898) volume 1, p. 340.

orthodox thinkers. Hobbes made it very clear he was deadly serious about disseminating his 'doctrine', if not simply by promoting *Leviathan* itself. In the late 1650s William Lucy, one of his clerical opponents, certainly recognised the effectiveness of the ideas, especially amongst a certain type of gentleman reader who 'meeting with new opinions, and some shew of reason for them, are by that means furnish'd the next table-meeting to surprise a poor Country-Parson, such as I, and he never dreaming of such an opinion, is vanquished'.⁴² Indeed, Lucy recognised that part of the attraction of Hobbes's work was its own cleverness and claim to learning. It was this assertion of contested expertise which underpinned the persistent hostility Hobbes manifest against the universities. As he explained, this criticism was not based on the existence of universities as corporations (or as he put it 'bodies artificial') but because of the behaviour of 'particular men that desire to uphold the Authority of a Church, as of a distinct thing from the Common-wealth'. The issue he had lay with the men rather than the institution. With the correct instruction (drawn from his own writings) 'wiser men may so digest the same Doctrine as to fit it better for a publique teaching'.

Rather cheekily (and useful as a measure of his broader intentions), Hobbes speculated that an alternative to simply recommending that *Leviathan* 'be taught in the Universities' would have been to propose 'the erecting of a New and Lay-University, wherein Lay-men should have the reading of Physiques, Mathematicks, Morall Philosophy, and Politicks, as the Clergy have now the sole teaching or Divinity'. Allowing his imagination some license, Hobbes described an economically frugal foundation ('without much publique charge') of one House and a few professional endowments. Such a lay university 'should be a place for such ingenuous men, as being free to dispose of their own time, love Truth for it self', rather than a destination for young men 'sent by their Parents, as to a Trade to get their living by'. Hobbes's fantasy ambitions for a non-clerical place of lay education which would act as a training ground for gentlemen who would promote the doctrines derived from a neat and compact curriculum (physics, maths, moral and political philosophy) most conducive to his over arching project of civil peace, were not realised in his lifetime.⁴³

⁴² W. Lucy, *Examinations, censures and confutations* (1656), Preface.

⁴³ Hobbes, *Six Lessons* pp. 60, 62. For further discussion see R. W. Serjeantson, 'Hobbes, the universities and the history of philosophy'. In C. Condren, S. Gaukroger, I. Hunter,

Hobbes persistently and resolutely disputed the clerical reading of his work: as he pointed out, 'But do not many other men as well as you read my Leviathan, and my other Books? And yet they all finde not such enmity in them against Religion'. His charge was serious—and premised on a fundamental epistemological equality. For, he warned, 'Take heed of calling them all Atheists that have read and approved my Leviathan. Do you think I can be an Atheist and not know it? Or knowing it durst have offered my Atheism to the Press?' Hobbes's fundamental complaint against the Church had always been their claim to premise independence from civil jurisdiction upon a putative interpretative competence to determine the truth of public and private religious forms. As he put it bluntly to his clerical antagonists, why should any one take direction 'From yourselves? Why so, more then from me?'. Indeed it was Hobbes's much bolder point in *Behemoth* to indict the full range of protestant clerical claims to authoritative interpretation of scripture. These seducers, by claiming a divine ambassadorial role from Christ, pretended to have 'a right from God' to govern both the parish and nation. Failing to understand the distinction between 'teaching' and 'commanding', such clergymen aimed to impose on the populace. This contradicted one stated aim of the 'reformation' which enjoined 'everyman is allowed to read and interpret to himself'. Judgement between Catholic and Protestant claims was subjected to individual examination of the text. The difficulty of scriptural meaning, combined with the belief that 'everyman, nay every boy and wench that could read English, thought they spoke with God Almighty, and understood what he said' meant a potentially combustible combination of radically incommensurable beliefs and convictions. The 'license of interpreting scriptures' caused an efflorescence of sectarianism and challenges to civil sovereignty. Hobbes's repeated point was that no clerical body could claim independent and divine authority for its partial readings of scripture. Preachers of all brands 'pretended' privileged access to God's truth via either their learning or 'inspiration': in all cases these were false claims contrived to fashion authority for ministers and 'hath very much conduced to the advancement of the professors thereof'.⁴⁴

(eds.), *The philosopher in early modern Europe: the nature of a contested identity* (Cambridge, 2006), 113–39. I am very grateful to the author for discussion of these points.

⁴⁴ Hobbes, *Behemoth*, pp. 2, 4–5, 8–9, 20–23, 38, 42, 50–53, 70, 91–92. For some thoughtful remarks on this subject see, J. R. Martel 'Strong sovereign, weak messiah: Thomas Hobbes on scriptural interpretation, rhetoric and the holy spirit', *Theory and Event*, 7, (2004).

The supreme civil power in the commonwealth was always the determining institution: as Hobbes implied, that civil authority might very well decide he was to define what was to be regarded as the truth rather than the Bishops, priests and 'Consistories of Presbyters by themselves, or joyned with Lay-Elders, whom they may sway as they please'. The claim that clergymen were 'wiser and learned than I' was dismissed with a flippant 'It may be so; but it has not yet appeared'. The claim to erudition or expertise ought not to be enough to convince any rational man: prefiguring the claims for independence of thought of men like Toland in *Christianity not mysterious* (1696), Hobbes declared, 'Is there any man so very a fool as to subject himself to the Rules of other men in those things which so neerly concern himself, for the Title they assume of being wise and learned, unless they also have the sword which must protect them'.⁴⁵ Only those men who derived their authority from civil sovereignty might expect to impose values and beliefs as commands. Obligation, or subscription, to such doctrines was an act, not of philosophical conviction, but of prudential inclination.

Hobbes was convinced that the clergy had deliberately misconstrued both his arguments and their intention. The ascription of heterodoxy and atheism was a reflection of their own anxieties rather than his bad conscience: 'But how, I say, could you think me an Atheist, unless it were because finding your doubts of the Deity more frequent than other men do, you are thereby the apter to fall upon that kinde of reproach?'. In a deliberate slur, Hobbes compared such priestly name-calling to that practiced by 'women of poor & evil Education when they scold; amongst whom the readiest disgracefull word is Whore. Why not Thief, or any other ill name, but because when they remember themselves, they think that reproach the likeliest to be true?'. His views on Christian doctrine, ceremony and practice, were scripturally derived and directed at the rebuttal of 'the power of the Roman Clergy'. Bemoaning the unexpected 'storm' that he then suffered at the hands of all sorts of Protestant clergy, he noted that the proper response would have been to address the import of the scriptural passages he cited, because 'I do but as the Scripture leads me. To the Texts whereof by me alleaded, you should either have answered, or else forborne to revile me for the conclusions I derived from them'. The point

⁴⁵ Hobbes, *Six Lessons* p. 62. For the intellectual intimacies between Toland and Hobbes see J. A. I. Champion 'Making authority: belief, conviction and reason in the public sphere in late seventeenth century England' in *Libertinage et Philosophie au XVII siècle*, 3, (1999), 143–190.

was that Protestant ‘ministers’ (Presbyterian and Church of England) were perfectly content to applaud and encourage assaults on ‘Papall Power’, but feared the potential repercussions for their own ecclesiastical power. In a startling image, Hobbes suggested that the clergy’s reactions to the attack on ‘popery’ were like some one ‘whose leg being cut off for prevention of a Gangrene that began in his Toe, would nevertheless complain of a pain in his Toe, when his leg was cut off’.⁴⁶

There is then considerable evidence to support a claim that Hobbes initiated one of the most powerful and persisting heterodox discourses of the period.⁴⁷ Certainly other anticlerical authors of a more historiographically recognisable radical hue like Charles Blount adopted and exploited Hobbes’s words and thoughts. Blount is an excellent case in point—his ‘Vade Mecum’ is scattered with anecdotes and commonplaces from his acquaintance with Hobbes, alongside a selection of the salacious *Facetiae* of Poggio (as well as the more respectable Bacon and Boyle).⁴⁸ Blount also cited a variety of Hobbes’s writings (acknowledged and unacknowledged) in his published works. His erudite and irreligious edition of Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius* (1680) contained a number of philological notes drawn from Hobbes’s works (again nestling alongside a remarkable range of irreligious classical, renaissance and *libertin érudit* works)—which displayed an evident absorption of the central Hobbesian theme of the political uses of religion.⁴⁹ Still later, Toland, Trenchard and Gordon, and the anonymous authors of clandestine works such as *Le traité des trois imposteurs* and *de tribus impostoribus* all exploited Hobbes’s words and arguments. Edmund Curll, ever sensitive to a market for controversial publications, saw a good opportunity in commissioning John Rook to translate Hobbes’s *Historia ecclesiastica* into English in 1722. This work turned Hobbes’s Latin into robust couplets aimed at exposing contemporary clerical corruption.⁵⁰

So Hobbes did not fade away—either in the intellectual toxicity of his reputation, or in the volume of his written material. The booksellers and

⁴⁶ Hobbes, *Six Lessons*, 63.

⁴⁷ Parkin, *Taming of Leviathan*, 301–302.

⁴⁸ The manuscript is in The Athenaeum at Casemark 100Ab. See the comment, ‘Mr Hobbs saies yt ye Nonconformist ministers seldom or never preach against Hypocrysie for fear of setting their audience a laughing’. ‘Vade mecum’ p. 6; he also cites from *Last sayings*, *Dialogues on Natural philosophy* and *Mr Hobbes considerations*.

⁴⁹ For a detailed discussion of this see D. A. Wilson’s ‘Reading Restoration free thought: Charles Blount’s impious learning’ (Unpublished London Ph.D. 2003).

⁵⁰ See P. Baines, P. Rogers, *Edmund Curll Bookseller* (Oxford, 2007), 147, 322, 349. Curll paid Rook £12.

publishers of London recognised and exploited a market for Hobbes's works, old and new. So for example, at the end of an ephemeral list of 'Books printed for William Crooke' it was noted that, 'There is printing an excellent piece of *Natural philosophy* in English, never before printed, written by Tho. Hobs of Malmesbury, who is yet living'.⁵¹ In the very broadest sense, William Crooke had inherited his uncle Andrew's publishing interest in the various writings of the elderly intellectual. Andrew, aptly described by Mark Goldie as the 'philosopher's man of business', had been responsible most significantly for the initial publication of *Leviathan* and subsequent attempts in 1670 and 1674 at a clandestine reprinting (known as the Head, the Bear and Ornaments). William was keen to continue with this commitment to Hobbes, providing both a range of publishing advice and administrative support. Indeed he had made this connection very explicit in two earlier printed publications which attempted to rivet in the mind of the book-buying community a necessary intimacy between his Green Dragon bookshop near Temple Bar and the *oeuvre* of possibly the most notorious author of the times.⁵² In another book trade pamphlet, *A catalogue of the works of Mr. Hobbes* (which was also appended to *A supplement to Mr. Hobbes his works printed by Blaeu at Amsterdam, 1661*) a numbered listing of the twenty-eight available printed works made it clear to any inquisitive reader what was available and where.⁵³ The variations of buying either single works in Latin or English or collections printed in Amsterdam were clearly noted.⁵⁴ As well as these 'published' works the catalogue noted a set of six scribal works 'Which... are delivered by the Author into the hands of W. Crooke'.⁵⁵ Although Hobbes was to die only

⁵¹ *Books printed for William Crooke at the Green Dragon without Temple-Bar*, Wing (2nd ed. prob. 1678) C7233A; p. 7.

⁵² *A supplement to Mr. Hobbes his works printed by Blaeu at Amsterdam, 1661. Being a third volume, containing* 1. *De Mirabilibus Pecci.* 2. *Three papers to the Royal Society against Dr. Wallis.* 3. *Lux mathematica.* 4. *Prima partis doctrinae wallisianae de motu cansura brevis.* 5. *Rosetum geometricum, sive propositiones aliquot frustra antehac tentatae.* 6. *Principia & problemata aliquot geometrica, ante desperata, nunc breviter explicata & demonstrata.* 7. *A catalogue of the author's works.* (London: printed by J. C. for W. Crooke, at the Green Dragon without Temple-Bar, 1675).

⁵³ (London: printed for W. Crooke, 1675).

⁵⁴ 'In two Volumes in 40 are Printed at Amsterdam, in Latine, what are figured 5, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, and 20. And in a third Vol. Printed at London for W. Crooke, are these Pieces figured 2, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, &c. The rest are to be had no otherwise but single'. See *A catalogue* (1675).

⁵⁵ '1. Epitome of the Civil Wars of England, from 1640. to 1660. 2. A Dialogue betwixt a Student in the Common Laws of England, and a Philosopher. 3. Defence of his *Leviathan* against Bp Bramhall. 4. *Hist. Ecclesiastica Romana.* 5. Of Heresie, and the Punishment

four years later it seems that access to a wide variety of his works was both possible and straightforward. Evidence from a number of sources indicates that the six manuscripts were indeed in circulation via access to the Green Dragon or by other circuits of exchange—the example of the ‘Brief historical narration concerning heresie’ which was read (in different copies) by both Bishop Thomas Barlow and Charles Blount shows the range of potential readers.⁵⁶ The point is that despite the unmistakably noxious reputation of the works (for surely no one could seek out Hobbes’s texts without realising they were indulging in a potentially poisonous quantity), people did still purchase them. Indeed after the author’s death in 1679 it might be no exaggeration to suggest that booksellers rushed to get as many versions of his post-Restoration scribal writings into the public domain.⁵⁷

Hobbes’s decisive heterodoxy (and his major achievement) was in proposing ‘man’ as the source of moral and religious value, rather than God. It was a turning point in the history of conceptualisations of the nature of human society and its relationship with political authority. Crucially this insight was directed against what he called the ‘kingdom of darkness’—not Satan and his legions, but all clergymen who claimed to be ambassadors of Christ. Authors of clandestine manuscripts, publishers of heterodox pamphlets and newspapers were to develop and sustain these arguments and commitments into the eighteenth century into a much more generic assault on ‘priestcraft’. The transformation of Hobbes’s subtle, erudite, witty and ambiguous post-clerical reading of scripture in Books 3 and 4 of *Leviathan* into the sort of explicitly anti-Christian writings of the early and high Enlightenment is a narrative still to be forensically explored, although Noel Malcolm has undertaken some preliminary survey of the terrain.⁵⁸

thereof. 6. His Life, Written by himself’. It is important to note here that a scribal version of the *Historia ecclesiastica* (Latin edition, 1688; English translation, 1722) was clearly available during Hobbes’s lifetime. Wheldon’s account book records a payment for copying a text of the same title in Autumn of 1671 (see K. Schuhmann *Hobbes. Une chronique* (Vrin, 1998) p. 210).

⁵⁶ John Aubrey claimed to have purchased a copy of the *Dialogue concerning common laws* from Croke in 1673 for 50s. Others like Hale, Vaughan and Charles II claimed to have seen copies of *Behemoth* in 1673.

⁵⁷ H. Macdonald, M. Hargreaves, *Thomas Hobbes: a bibliography* (Bibliographical Society, 1952), 46–80.

⁵⁸ See Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, 457–546.

Whereas modern thinkers may be content (under the heading of some form of relativism or toleration) to hold back their criticism of the plausibility of 'religious' convictions, Hobbes was sure that most of the 'beliefs' of his day were irrational and as a consequence politically dangerous. The intention of *Leviathan* was to render the claims of religion and associated clerical institutions unobjectionable, either by collapsing them into an aspect of political institutions, or by forcing them into operating only in the realm of the private. Whether Hobbes's strategy for dealing with the role of religion as an aspect of the modern state was effective is open to debate. That the 'Kingdom of Darkness', despite Hobbes's efforts, still remained a plausible phenomenon into the eighteenth century is exemplified in a work entitled *Evidences of the Kingdom of Darkness* published in 1770.⁵⁹ Operating in the same genre as the works of Hallywell and Crouch (noted above), the disposition of the collection of 'authentic and entertaining narratives of the real existence' of ghosts, demons and spectres was different. Arguing that 'the moderns' were used to treating such matters with 'the utmost freedom'—and unaccustomed to simply trusting the reports of 'the antiquated book' (the Bible)—the author of the *Evidences* subjected such 'stories' to forensic scrutiny. Such 'enlightened children' would 'take nothing upon trust, nor believe anything but what is brought home to our senses': the counter-intuitive conclusion of the work was, of course, that the testimony of 'unexceptionable witnesses' established the 'facts' to the 'rational, serious, and candid part of mankind' who employed 'unprejudiced reason'. Only those 'libertines and infidels' distorting the claims of reason into incredulity would remain unconvinced by the truth of such 'wonders'—as the author lamented such 'ignorance is incurable'. Hobbes would have despaired.⁶⁰

One of the most dramatic consequences of Hobbes's argument was to remove the epistemic boundary between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. No longer was the issue the relationship between true and false, right or wrong; instead the 'correctness' of ideas was defined by public power, rather than minorities claiming privileged access to some super-national truth because of their prophetic or apostolic status. In effect, Hobbes had laid bare the conventional social mechanism which produced all such

⁵⁹ *Evidences of the kingdom of darkness: being a collection of authentic and entertaining narratives of...ghosts, demons, and spectres: together with several wonderful instances of the effects of witchcraft. To which is prefixed, an account of haunted houses* (London: printed for T. Evans, 1770).

⁶⁰ *Evidences of the kingdom of darkness* pp. vi, vii, viii.

ideas: after Hobbes it would be very difficult for any institution to demand unflinching belief from the people without the imprimatur of the state. The 'truth' as Hobbes understood it, in public, was a set of power claims which necessarily needed to be policed by the civil sovereign; otherwise, as Chapter 29 of *Leviathan* established, civil disorder was a likely consequence. The result of this position was that the traditional understanding of the problem of religious heterodoxy (that it compromised the possibilities of salvation) was simply sidestepped. Hobbes's footwork was not received with applause.

This requires some further explanation if we are to appreciate the profundity of Hobbes's contribution. Hobbes recognised the power of ideas; this is surely one of the paradoxes of such a materialist thinker. He also understood the potentially destructive consequences of undisciplined religious expression (in fact he claimed that all the serious disorders in human history had been caused by priests of one sort or another). Hobbes also recognised the possibilities of what might be called 'sincere' heterodoxy—parts 3 and 4 of *Leviathan* establish that it was plausible to construct cogent, scripturally-sanctioned theological doctrine, which fundamentally differed from nearly all contemporary accounts. It was always Hobbes's claim that his theology was neither illegal, nor heterodox—although after 1660 sustaining the latter claim became complicated. His own partial amendments to the Latin text of *Leviathan* tend to suggest an awareness of the possibilities of legal prosecution for theological deviancy. It is unlikely that he ever convinced any of his opponents of either his religious integrity or orthodoxy; indeed, one of the obvious questions which has not been asked is why he continued to bother maintaining this clearly untenable position? It is clear that Hobbes personally despised mental oppression and even more so ignorance; it is entirely possible that his extensive theological claims in the second half of *Leviathan* were there to show that a reasonable lay person might construct a civil theology readily adaptable to the needs of civil peace. Hobbes may have hoped to show contemporaries that heterodoxy might be more useful than orthodoxy to the needs of the state and civil peace.

This view may seem wilfully out of kilter with many commonplace accounts of Hobbes, which see him as the theorist of the absolute state, the voice of the coercive rule of law and the interests of security, authority and order. It is true that he never aligned himself with the liberalism of the Lockean project which sought to protect the sincere Christian conscience from invasion by predatory monarchs, priests or neighbours. It is too simple, however, to suggest that Hobbes was authoritarian in his incli-

nations, intending to legitimate the use of the sword and crosier as tools for collective oppression.⁶¹ There is little evidence that this is the case. Like many contemporaries Hobbes insisted that the civil sovereign held a strict monopoly in all matters of opinion. But unlike many of his fellow thinkers, Hobbes held that this monopoly included jurisdiction over all forms of Christian faith, including both flocks and pastors. This meant that his polemic was aimed as much at sources of heterodoxy as well as those institutions which defended Anglican orthodoxy. Viscerally hostile to 'popery' as any sincere 'protestant' ought to have been, Hobbes also recognised that a no less profound threat to the stability of civil power originated in the post-reformation efflorescence of (mainly Protestant) heterodoxy.

Although as yet underexplored, Hobbes's scepticism about the integrity of claims to the sanctity of 'conscience' pitched him against the post-puritan sectarian as much as the mainstream Anglican and Roman Catholic. Law was the only 'public conscience' Hobbes regarded as safe. The 'reverenced name of conscience'—whether Catholic, Protestant or heretical—was potentially the root of dissidence and disorder.⁶² The complexity of this position, which at core defended the unchallengeable authority of civil sovereignty from contamination by any form of clerical independence, became manifest after 1660 when his primary target became the restored episcopacy who were hell bent on the legal re-imposition of *de jure divino* conceptions in Church and State. For the last twenty years of his life Hobbes's concern to secure a private sphere of individual judgement from interference by a persecuting clerical authority was, in effect, a defence of heterodoxy. In doing so he did not retreat from his views on the power of the civil sovereign, but rebutted the arguments with which the resurgent clericalism of the Restored regime attempted to capture the legislative power of the state to its own ends. Hobbes invoked the Old Testament precedent of Naaman's combination of public conformity and private heterodoxy against

⁶¹ For some supporting suggestions see the series of articles by J. R. Martel, 'The radical promise of Thomas Hobbes: the road not taken in liberal theory' *Theory and Event* 4 (2000); 'Strong sovereign, weak messiah: Thomas Hobbes on scriptural interpretation, rhetoric and the holy spirit', *Theory and Event*, 7, (2004); 'The spectacle of the Leviathan; Thomas Hobbes, Guy Debord and Walter Benjamin on representation and its misuses' *Law, culture and the humanities* 2 (2006), 67–90. For a contrary but thoughtful view see J. Waldron 'Hobbes on public worship', *Nomos* 48 (2009).

⁶² For an excellent engagement with this issue see K. S. Feldman 'Conscience and the concealments of metaphor in Hobbes's *Leviathan*'. *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 34 (2001), 21–37, see esp. 22, 26.

the inquisitorial scrutiny of contemporary churchmen. This was not to sketch out a proto-Lockean argument defending the right of each individual Christian (who was not a Roman Catholic) to have freedom of worship, but to secure a private realm of belief beyond the legitimate and efficient jurisdiction of any sovereignty, especially one contaminated by 'popery'.⁶³ This view ran up hard against those Godly men who believed it was the duty of the state to root out all unbelief and ungodliness in the interest of the purity of the community.⁶⁴ Unlike Locke, Hobbes did not contrive his arguments to defend the sincere Christian conscience, nor were they intended to promote conscientious challenges to existing political power. Hobbes's heterodoxy was to have secured a space for the freedom of thought within a potentially authoritarian political system, in order to protect the individual mind from personal domination by the 'religious', whether in institutional or individual forms.

⁶³ See discussion in J. A. I. Champion "Le culte prive quand il est rendu dans le secret": Hobbes, Locke et les limites de la tolerance, l'atheisme et l'heterodoxie". In Y. Charles Zarka, F. Lessay and J. Rogers (eds.) *Les fondements philosophiques de la tolerance* (Paris, 2002), volume 1, 221–253.

⁶⁴ M. A. Goldie, 'The Theory of Religious Intolerance in Restoration England', in O. Grell, J. Israel, N. Tyacke, (eds.), *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England* (Oxford, 1991), 331–68.

HENRY STUBBE, ROBERT BOYLE AND THE IDOLATRY OF NATURE

Martin Mulsow

Religious heterodoxy is the deviation from 'right,' socially sanctioned doctrines within a given religion. On many occasions, the wrongful influence of 'false religions,' *religiones falsae*, to use the words of Lactantius, has been considered the cause of this deviation. During the early modern period, the fundamental term for such false, especially heathen religions, was 'idololatria.' The intellectual consequences of religious heterodoxy can, therefore, also be consequences of an idolatrous religion, of the worship of false, lower deities instead of the true God. Those involved in such idolatry moved along lines of reference which seemed misguided to their orthodox contemporaries; their religious worship was directed towards the stars, towards the world, or towards nature rather than towards the one true God. Because idolatry displaced God from the centre of religious worship, it can be linked to the process of secularization. Given the importance of idolatry in early modern scholarly debates, the attention devoted to it by recent historians seems entirely necessary and appropriate. This essay will expand and develop upon the themes raised in recent writing.¹

The hermeneutics of this thinking is the formula of 'anxiety of influence,' not in Harold Bloom's sense,² but as the fear of harmful influences on true Christianity and true philosophy. Jacob Böhme's philosophy was often portrayed as the result of the harmful influence of gnosis and Zoroastrianism, the philosophy of Spinoza as the result of the harmful influence of Stoicism and Neo-Platonism, and Socinianism as the result of the harmful influence of Islam, just to take a few examples.³ These kinds of

¹ On idolatry in general, see Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); for the early modern period: Frank K. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959); Guy G. Stroumsa, 'John Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry', *History of Religions* 41 (2002), 1–23; Martin Mulsow, 'John Seldens *De Diis Syris*: Idolatriekritik und vergleichende Religionsgeschichte im 17. Jahrhundert', *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 3 (2001), 1–24; idem, 'Antiquarianism and Idolatry. The "Historia" of Religions in the Seventeenth Century', in: Gianna Pomata and Nancy G. Siraisi (eds.), *Historia. Empiricism and Erudition in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 181–210; and the special issue of the *Journal for the History of Ideas* 67/4 (2006).

² Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford, 1973).

³ On Böhme, see Martin Mulsow, 'Den Heydnischen Saurteig mit den Israelitischen Süßteig vermengt: Kabbala, Hellenisierungsthese und Pietismusstreit bei Abraham

genealogies go back at least as far as the Counter-Reformation (to figures such as Possevino and Crispo in Rome), and they peak during the second half of the seventeenth century.⁴ In Germany, Jacob Thomasius wrote an influential genealogy of pantheist thought in 1665; around the same time, Cudworth called pantheism 'world-idolatry', and Abraham Hinckelmann wrote a history of dualist thought (1693). In the Netherlands, Abraham Heidanus, professor of theology at the University of Leiden, traced heresy and false beliefs to a harmful blend of philosophy and theology in his *De origine erroris* (1678), the title of which echoes not only Lactantius, but also Bullinger's treatise from 1528 (expanded edition 1539). Bullinger's work contains a brief history of idolatry—especially as it was found in such Catholic practices as the worship of saints, worship of images, and the worship of the host—and Heidanus develops Bullinger's work into a long story.⁵ Both Heidanus's *De origine erroris* and Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, published in the same year, made extensive use of materials from Gerhard Johannes Vossius's great history of idolatry, *De theologia gentili*, which was published posthumously in 1668.⁶ Each of them integrates Vossius's religious-historical findings into a specific philosophical and theological agenda, in Cudworth's case a Neoplatonic-Latitudinarian and in Heidanus' case a Cartesian-Calvinist. Cudworth interprets atheist-atomist views as misunderstandings and degenerative patterns of an original truth, which consists in the doctrine of animate atoms. Conversely, in the course of his survey of human intellectual history, he shows a posteriori that the idea of God was in a certain way always

Hinckelmann und Johann Peter Späth', *Scientia Poetica* 11 (2007), 1–50; on Spinoza: Sicco Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte. Philosophiegeschichte zwischen Barock und Aufklärung* (Tübingen, 2004).

⁴ See Martin Mulsow, *Moderne aus dem Untergrund. Radikale Frühaufklärung in Deutschland 1680–1720* (Hamburg, 2002), 276–308.

⁵ See Carlos Eire, *War against the Idols. The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge, 1986), 86–88. Heinrich Bullinger, *De origine erroris* (Basel: Wolf, 1528; Zürich: Froschauer 1568); Abraham Heidanus, *De origine erroris libri octo* (Amsterdam: Someren, 1678).

⁶ Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London: Royston, 1678); Gerhard Johannes Vossius, *De theologia gentili et physiologia christiana sive de origine et progressu idololatriae* (Amsterdam: Bleau, 1668). On Vossius as a source for Cudworth, see Richard H. Popkin, 'Cudworth', in idem: *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden, 1992), 333–350. On Vossius' book see Aaron Katchen, *Christian Hebraists and Dutch Rabbis. Seventeenth-Century Apologetics and the Study of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984); Ralph Häfner, *Götter im Exil. Frühneuzeitliches Dichtungsverständnis im Spannungsfeld christlicher Apologetik und philologischer Kritik* (ca. 1590–1736) (Tübingen, 2003).

known, even in different cultures. This, he believes, is strong evidence for the existence of the one true God. Heidanus' story is rather different. He assigns the scope of Cartesian free will only to the human condition before the Fall. Thereafter, humanity is deprived of its freedom and exists in a world of predestination and idolatry. Heidanus sees idolatry as a very human tendency, to which fallen men are naturally prone. Cudworth, on the other hand, sees idolatry as a degeneration from the original monotheism of mankind, which human beings are able to combat. As this suggests, Heidanus's survey of intellectual history has a negative slant, while Cudworth's approach is more optimistic.

Despite these differences, both Cudworth and Heidanus view idolatry as the misguided focus on an object that is viewed as the most exalted. Most importantly, this false worship stems from an erroneous cognitive disposition; it is the result of assumptions which are false and which lead men and women into error. These assumptions need not be specifically religious, they may be philosophical or scientific, and they may or may not lead all those who hold them to draw the same conclusions. Thus we are dealing with a complex pattern here: genuine religious attitudes, such as an 'enthusiastic' religious individualism, may have intellectual consequences such as the forging of a theory of inner light, but at the same time, intellectual attitudes such as the attribution of certain forces to heavenly bodies may have religious consequences such as astrolatry. Of course, such a comparison is not entirely symmetrical. Whereas the first scenario describes genuine consequential processes in the early modern period, the second one falls more into the category of polemical and denunciatory attribution. Although the ancients who recognized the powers of the stars saw worship of them as a logical consequence, this was no longer the case in Christian Europe after the Renaissance. Few of those who ascribed forces to heavenly bodies went so far as to worship them.

Yet the heterodox consequences of involving the heavenly bodies could be striking, and those who denounced astrolatry in the early modern world had serious cause for concern. As I will show in this essay, the connection between unorthodox views of the power of the stars, idolatry and even atheism becomes plausible once we turn our attention to the interchange of religion and philosophy, and to the close relationship between religion and science during the early modern period. Rather than fearing real star worship, people were more concerned about a general naturalism with its desacralizing effects on anything related to religion.

Truth and error are key terms in this discussion, not just correct or incorrect behaviour or right or wrong cultic practice. For it was generally accepted

that behaviour and practices stemmed from people's own commitment to religious truth—or religious error. As a result, those who strayed from what was generally seen as truth were regarded with suspicion and as untrustworthy; how, it was asked, could they have any firm moral base? The connections between truth, trust and science have been explored by Stephen Shapin, who argues in his *Social History of Truth* that science 'is a system of knowledge by virtue of its being a system of trusting persons.'⁷ There are analogies here with religion, and we may even be entitled to speak of a religious as well as a social history of truth.

A religious history of truth would be in its broadest sense a cultural history of religious conditions of truth and of the anxiety of influence of untruth. Indeed, questions of religious truth in the early modern world tended to be intertwined with other intellectual issues, including moral and natural philosophy. Moreover, and as this suggests, the consequences of any religious heterodoxy would be far-reaching. Peter Harrison has illuminated one aspect of these intellectual connections, arguing that the concentration on the literal sense in the biblical criticism of the seventeenth century exercised a stimulating effect on the natural sciences.⁸ In their collection of papers, John Brooke and Ian Maclean have illustrated other facets of the relationship between religious truth and broader philosophical and cultural history.⁹ In what follows, I shall only focus on one small example of the consequences of implicit heresy, and the fears which it aroused. This example will serve to illustrate the connections between idolatry and naturalism, astrology and astrolatry that were posited in the years around 1660, especially in England.

II

We may begin our religious history of truth with an episode from the history of smell.¹⁰ Valentine Greatrakes, a famous miracle healer from England during the 1660s enters the house of Viscount Edward Conway intending

⁷ Stephen Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago, 1994), 417.

⁸ Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge, 1998).

⁹ John Brooke and Ian Mclean (eds.), *Heterodoxy in Early Modern Science and Religion* (Oxford, 2005).

¹⁰ See Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986).

to cure the latter's wife's headaches—and he smells good. Conway notices 'a smell strangely pleasant, as if it had been of sundry flowers.'¹¹ He is surprised, smells Greatrakes's hand, his chest; all of these emit a pleasant smell, despite the fact that Greatrakes did not use any perfume. Conway thereupon has his physician examine Greatrakes's urine, which turns out to have an astonishing smell of violets.

Why this particular interest in smell at Ragley, the manor of the Conways in Warwickshire? It was based mainly on the belief that the miracle healer worked his magic through his bodily emanations, his effluvia. Although this was an early modern assumption, it had long cultural roots. Back in ancient Greece it had been a characteristic of the Gods or god-like creatures that they emitted a pleasant smell.¹² How, then, could this interest in smell help to interpret the healing carried out by a man, who apparently had a 'divine' gift? To understand this, we need to turn to the writing of Henry Stubbe, physician, natural philosopher and former republican, who was physically present then at Ragley. Stubbe did not deny the miracles of Greatrakes, instead, he tried to explain them scientifically—and the pleasant smell of the healer offered a good starting point. In his treatise from 1666, *The Miraculous Conformist*, Stubbe used the prevailing theory of effluvia set out by Thomas Willis to explain what had happened. According to him, harmful effluvia of the patient were eliminated by Greatrakes's good effluvia and the desired process of fermentation of the chemical processes in the blood was restored. The pleasant odour of Greatrakes was, Stubbe thought, a testament to the high quality of his bodily constitution and to the excellence of the effluvia which emanated from him and which he could infuse into another person's body through the imposition of his hands or through light strokes.¹³

As is well known, James R. Jacob has viewed the *Miraculous Conformist* as a subversive treatise, in which its naturalist explanations are not as innocent as they might seem. Indeed, Jacob argues, Stubbe's explanations imply that there is no such thing as a miracle in the sense of a supernatural intervention and that what is apparently supernatural cannot be

¹¹ Henry Stubbe, *The Miraculous Conformist* (Oxford: Hall/Davis, 1666), 11. On Greatrakes see Leonard Pitt, *A Small Moment of Great Illumination: Searching for Valentine Greatrakes, the Master Healer* (Washington, DC, 2006); A. Bryan Laver, 'Miracles No Wonder! The Mesmeric Phenomena and Organic Cures of Valentine Greatrakes', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 33/1 (1978), 35–46.

¹² See Ernst Lohmeyer, 'Vom göttlichen Wohlgeruch', in: *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philologisch-historische Klasse* 9 (1919).

¹³ Stubbe, *The Miraculous Conformist*.

separated from the natural world. Jacob's thesis seems to me to be correct, and here I want to illuminate further the religious and historical background to the *Miraculous Conformist*. This will help to show why some of Stubbe's early readers also came to the same conclusion.¹⁴

The miracle cures by men such as Greatrakes were by no means unproblematic, either in a religious or a political sense. During the Restoration, Charles II introduced again the treatment of patients of scrofula with the royal touch.¹⁵ This presumed cure served to emphasize the divine authority of kingship. If someone such as the 'Irish stroker' Greatrakes mastered the healing of scrofula patients just as well as the king, then the line between top and bottom, between king and simple man would no longer be assured. Just about half a century earlier, when the French kings reclaimed the royal touch as well, it was criticized indirectly by Jean Filesac, a theologian from Paris, who published a treatise about 'political idolatry' in 1615.¹⁶ According to Filesac, political idolatry is the worship of a king instead of God, due to the erroneous equation of kingship with the divine. To a theologian, this was blasphemous. Earlier, in 1609, Filesac had published a similar treatise, entitled *De idololatria magica*. Referring to Tertullian numerous times, he viewed as magical idolatry the witchcraft of his time and possibly targeted at the same time Parisian Paracelsians such as Joseph Du Chesne. Filesac pointed out that magic was a kind of idolatry, because in that case supernatural powers, which are normally exclusive to the creator, are ascribed to certain beings or are used by them—in this case not by the king, but by witches.¹⁷

The indirect connection between magic and political idolatry should catch our attention. It sheds light on the comparable subject that was relevant in England about fifty years later during the Restoration. In the

¹⁴ James R. Jacob, *Henry Stubbe, Radical Protestantism and the Early Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983), 50–63 and 165–173. But see the criticism of Jacob by Nicholas H. Ste-neck, 'Greatrakes the Stroker: The Interpretations of Historians', *Isis* 73 (1982), 161–177.

¹⁵ See Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in France and England* (London, 1973).

¹⁶ Jean Filesac, *De idololatra politica, et legitimo principis cultu commentarius* (Paris: Maceus, 1615).

¹⁷ Jean Filesac, *De idololatria magica, dissertatio* (Paris: Ex Officina Nivelliana, Apud Sebastianvm Cramoisy, 1609). On Joseph Du Chesne see Didier Kahn, *Alchimie et Paracel-sisme en France (1567–1625)* (Geneva, 2007). Filesac holds with Tertullian that practicing magic is worshipping the devil. 18: 'Cum iam Christi fides in dies magis ac magis propagere-tur, daemonumque potentia passim à Christianis traduceretur, tum vix daemones palam et publice se deos praedicabant, at in Magia in quam ut tutissimam arcem sese receperant, audacter Deos se profitebantur, quemadmodum refert Tertullianus libro de Anima: [...].'

case of Greatrakes's healings, Stubbe's contemporary David Lloyd brought up the charge of dangerous fraud against Greatrakes, and he—rightly—placed Stubbe's explanation of Greatrakes's cures close to Renaissance treatises on natural magic.¹⁸ Indeed, even if Stubbe apparently only gives a scientific explanation of the 'miracles', the implications of the argument inescapably have a subversive effect: if Greatrakes was able to perform healings due to his ideal temperament, to his divine-like nature, then this may have been the case with Christ as well. This ultimately qualifies and undermines Christ's miracles: they are no longer indicators of God's supernatural intervention in the world, but they become natural, albeit extraordinary, phenomena. It is hard to tell whether Stubbe makes use of the libertine strategy of indirect argumentation and his real goal was to polemicize against Christ and his miracles, or whether he was just willing to accept such consequences.¹⁹

Whatever the case might be, in order to support his naturalist explanations, Stubbe makes use of the Galenic theory of the *optima temperies*, the ideal bodily constitution.²⁰ His approach is similar to that of Pietro Pomponazzi in his *De incantationibus*, where the Italian philosopher remarks that there are at times certain human beings, 'who through the influence of the Gods or the stars possess without any practice and effort a knowledge of the stars, of all prophetic signs, dreams and other things and work miracles.'²¹ Such rare men have an ideal physical constitution and they have become what they are through the influence of the stars. The anti-Christian effect of Pomponazzi's work was ultimately the same, which explains why he was prudent enough not to publish it during his lifetime.²²

¹⁸ [David Lloyd], *Wonders No Miracles* (London, 1666).

¹⁹ On the libertine strategies see Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, *Dis/simulations. Jules-César Vanini, François La Mothe Le Vayer, Gabriel Naudé, Louis Machon et Torquato Accetto. Religion, morale et politique au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 2002).

²⁰ See Martin Mulsow, 'Der vollkommene Mensch. Zur Prähistorie des Posthumanen', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 5, (2003), 739–760; idem: 'Das Vollkommene als Faszinosum des Sozialimaginären', in: Aleida Assmann / Jan Assmann (eds.): *Das Vollkommene* (München: Fink, in print)—On the religious history of european science in general see Burkhard Gladigow: '“Wir gläubigen Physiker”. Zur Religionsgeschichte physikalischer Entwicklungen im 20. Jahrhundert', in: Hartmut Zinser (ed.), *Der Untergang von Religionen* (Berlin, 1986), 321–336.

²¹ Pietro Pomponazzi, *De naturalium effectuum causis, sive de incantationibus* (Basel: Henricpetrina, 1567).

²² See Giancalo Zanier, *Ricerche sulla diffusione e fortuna del De incantationibus di Pomponazzi* (Firenze, 1975); Paola Zambelli, 'Pietro Pomponazzi's De immortalitate and

According to Jacob, Stubbe wrote his *Miraculous Conformist* so that he could plead for a naturalist interpretation of the corpuscular theory and against attempts to reconcile the new sciences with theist Christianity. Lloyd, however, viewed Stubbe's explanation as a regression to sympathetic magic, of the kind associated with Girolamo Cardano or the Paracelsians, and he would have agreed with Filesac in his condemnation of political and magic idolatry, in the sense of deceptive, subversive, and naturalist tendencies. These different reactions to Stubbe's *Miraculous Conformist* show how contested the interpretation of a naturalistic argument could be. Such an argument was heavily loaded with aspects of both political and magical idolatry, either because astrology replaced God's supernatural powers or because it referred to magic practised through occult powers that were potentially demonic.

III

Stubbe wrote his *Miraculous Conformist* in the format of a letter to Robert Boyle, who had been a patron of his during these years. Boyle supported Stubbe because he viewed him as a formerly radical mind, who could be re-educated in the spirit of the Royal Society and won over to the alliance of experimental philosophy and latitudinarian Anglicanism which Boyle hoped to promote. But what Stubbe had written in his *Miraculous Conformist* went too far for his correspondent. After Boyle had received the book from Stubbe, he replied on 9 March 1666, denouncing 'Those enemies to Christianity [...] that granting the truth of the historical part of the New Testament (which relates to the miracles) have gone about to give an account of it by celestial influences or natural (though peculiar) complexions or such conceits, which have quite lost them, in my thoughts, the title of knowing naturalists.'²³ Boyle apparently had identified two strategies of the 'enemies of Christianity': an astrological and a complexional explanation of the miracles of Christ. But both are in fact only one strategy: namely the one based on the historical astrology in the tradition of Abū Ma'šar, which claims that during times of so called great conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn the influence of the stars produces

his clandestine De incantationibus: Aristotelianism, eclecticism or libertinism?', *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* 6, (2001), 87–115.

²³ *The Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, 6 vols ed. Thomas Birch, (London 1772), vol. I, p. LXXIX; see Jacob: *Stubbe*, 56.

human beings who are prophets and who create new religions.²⁴ Around the year 1300, the Italian Pietro d'Abano combined this theory with the Galenic doctrine of the *optima temperies* in his *Conciliator*.²⁵ According to d'Abano, the influence of the stars produces human beings who have a perfect mixture of bodily fluids, and this enables them to make prophecies and work miracles. Such men, like Moses, Jesus or Mohamad, are *homines perfecti*. This theory prompted the Church to disinter Pietro's body and burn it, because, if it was possible to cast a 'horoscope of religions' such as Christianity, then the divine nature of Christ would naturally be abolished by such determinism and the Christian religion would become just one cultural phenomenon among many others. This is why Boyle viewed historical astrologers as the heirs of Pietro d'Abano as 'enemies of Christianity.' D'Abano was not alone in his beliefs, however, and his writings inspired and influenced such illustrious figures as Pietro Pomponazzi, Girolamo Cardano, and Giordano Bruno.²⁶ Although Stubbe never talked about astrology in his *Miraculous Conformist*, Boyle nonetheless knew that the homo-perfectus naturalism, on which Stubbe's theory was based, had an astrological side to it.

This heterodox tradition of astrology may have been in Boyle's mind when he composed his digression about the history of idolatry in the *Free Enquiry into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature*. By drawing attention to it, I hope to shed light on a connection between idolatry and astrology, which James Jacob has still left somewhat unclear. In the digression Boyle, having read Maimonides, explains that the oldest form of idolatry was practiced by the Sabians in their worship of the stars.²⁷ We can now see that this claim fits exactly with his concern in his letters to Stubbe about the explanation through 'celestial influences' by the 'enemies of Christianity'. For Boyle, astrology and astrolatry had always played central parts in non-Christian explanations for miracles, and he feared that in his own time they might contribute to the rise of atheism and unbelief.

²⁴ Abū Ma'šar on *Historical Astrology. The Book of Religions and Dynasties (On the Great Conjunctions)*, ed. and translated by Keji Yamamoto and Charles Burnett, 2 vols. (Leiden, 2000); see also David Pingree, *The Thousands of Abū Ma'shar* (London, 1968).

²⁵ Pietro d'Abano, *Conciliator controversiarum, quae inter philosophos et medicos versantur* (Venetiis: apud Iuntas, 1565). See Eugenia Paschetto, *Pietro d'Abano, medico e filosofo* (Firenze, 1984).

²⁶ See Eugenio Garin, *Astrology in the Renaissance: The Zodiac of Life* (London, Boston, 1983).

²⁷ Robert Boyle, *A Free Enquiry into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature*, ed. Edward B. Davis and Michael Hunter (Cambridge, 1996).

How did the scientist Boyle know about all of these connections from the field of the history of religions? During the late 1640s, Boyle was greatly impressed by the Irish archbishop and chronologer James Ussher, and he had studied biblical philology, ancient languages, and the history of religions. In the course of his travel to the Netherlands in 1648, he met and talked with Menasseh ben Israel.²⁸ A draft from that period, his *Essay Of the Holy Scriptures*, already takes up subjects in the history of religion.²⁹ When Boyle read Johann Heinrich Hottinger's *Historia orientalis* after 1651, he could learn more about the legendary Sabians in section VIII of this book, and his studies of the works of Selden and Vossius complemented this perspective.³⁰

Around the mid 1660s, just about the time of the Greatrakes controversy, Boyle wrote a first draft of his *Free Enquiry*, which combines both the history of religion and natural philosophy. Its main thesis is: if too much power is assigned to the inner forces of nature, then one idolises nature and deprives God of the honor of being the sole influence on the natural activities. 'Nature' for Boyle is no active substance, it is something passive and without forces. Everybody who talks about a 'natura universalis,' an 'anima mundi,' or nature's force to preserve and regenerate, dishonours God and becomes, at least implicitly, an atheist.³¹

Some of the basic principles of Hippocratic and Galenic medicine come in for particular criticism from Boyle. He focuses on maxims which suggest that nature is an independent, active force, maxims like 'natura est morborum medicatrix,' 'natura nihil facit frustra,' or 'omnis natura est conservatrix sui'.³² In Boyle's religious-historical perspective these ideas appear as pagan remnants, which still persist into his own time. In a simi-

²⁸ See Boyle: *A Free Enquiry*, 46 ('with whom I have conversed at Amsterdam'). Boyle cites Menasseh ben Israel, *De creatione problemata XXX* (Amsterdam: Janssonius 1635). On Menasseh, see Cecil Roth, 'The Mystery of the Resettlement' in his: *Essays and Portraits* (Philadelphia, 1962), 86–107; 306–8.

²⁹ See Michael Hunter and Edward B. Davis, 'The Making of Robert Boyle's *Free Enquiry into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature* (1686),' *Early Science and Medicine* 1 (1996): 204–71.

³⁰ The reference to Hottinger is in *Free Enquiry*, 42. Johann Heinrich Hottinger: *Historia Orientalis quae ex variis orientalium monumentis collecta* (Zürich: Bodmer, 1651). On Hottinger, see Jan Loop: 'Johann Heinrich Hottinger (1620–1667) and the *Historia Orientalis*,' *Church History and Religious Culture* 88 (2008), 169–203. John Selden, *De Diis Syris Syntaxma* (London: Stansbeius, 1617); Vossius: *De theologia gentili*.

³¹ *Free Enquiry*, section IV. See Martin Mulsow, 'Idolatry and Science. Against Nature Worship from Boyle to Rüdiger, 1680–1720', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67:4 (2006), 697–711.

³² *Free Enquiry*, 31ff.

lar way, he felt that the deification of nature, which he associated with Orphism, still exercised considerable influence in contemporary Aristotelianism. On Boyle's reasoning, such deifications of nature or of stars have to be rejected not only from a Christian point of view but—and here we hear the voice of the scientist—because they contradict the evidence which men can gather from modern scientific instruments. For Boyle, his contemporaries had no excuse: 'For whereas the Sabians and Chaldeans considered and adored the planets as the chief god, our telescopes discover to us that [...] they shine but by a borrowed light.'³³

Based on a study of the original manuscript, which allowed for a distinction between early drafts of the *Enquiry* and later additions, Michael Hunter has disagreed with Jacob's interpretation that Boyle responded specifically to Stubbe.³⁴ But even if Hunter is right and Boyle was referring to Galenic-Aristotelian naturalism in general, as well as to Paracelsians and philosophers such as Francis Glisson or Ralph Cudworth with their theories of an 'energetical' or 'plastic' nature, Hunter nonetheless talks about the experience of a crisis in Boyle, an experience of what I have called 'the anxiety of influence'. Boyle's crisis was prompted by his fear of naturalism, whose genealogy he sought to explain by placing it in its religious-historical context and tracing it all the way back to ancient Sabeian star worship. Boyle was only too aware of the consequences, both for Christianity and for natural philosophy, of any theory which attributed too much power and agency to nature as an independent force. A true 'notion of nature' would avoid the pitfalls of the ancient idolaters and would give God the honour he deserved, but it would also provide men with their best explanation of the earthly world.

IV

This religious-historical component to natural philosophy becomes especially clear once we take a look at the impact of Boyle's *Free Enquiry* on the continent, in the reception of the book during the 1690s by Johann

³³ *Free Enquiry*, 55f.

³⁴ Michael Hunter and Edward B. Davis, 'The Making of Robert Boyle's *Free Enquiry into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature* (1686)'; see also Hunter's *Robert Boyle (1627–91): Scrupulosity and Science* (Woodbridge, 2000), and his: *Boyle: Between God and Science* (New Haven, 2009). On Francis Glisson, see now Karin Hartbecke, *Metaphysik und Naturphilosophie im 17. Jahrhundert: Francis Glissons Substanztheorie in ihrem ideengeschichtlichen Kontext* (Tübingen, 2006).

Christoph Sturm and others. Sturm uses the term *Idolum naturae* when he argues, just like Boyle, for a notion of nature which is deprived of any internal forces. His opponent, Günther Christoph Schelhammer, took the Aristotelian stance and defended the traditional understanding of nature, while Leibniz proposed a subtle compromise in his *De ipsa natura*. From a different angle, Andreas Rüdiger was also concerned with the relationship between nature, force, and idolatry.³⁵ It is apparent from all these authors that in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, religious-philosophical excursions were essential parts of works on physics. They did not serve only for illustrative purposes, but they were central to the argument as a whole.

Even in the 1740s, we can still see the after-effects of the dispute about the 'idolum naturae', for example in Christian Gabriel Fischer's *Vernünfftige Gedanken über die Natur*, a work strongly influenced by Christian Wolff. According to Fischer, 'it is well-known what kind of crude errors, countless disputes, imprudent and almost infuriating conversations have come from the abused term nature into this world and have inundated it. I have travelled these rapids for almost forty years now and I have looked in many places for the spring of sound knowledge.'³⁶ Fischer then proceeds

³⁵ Johann Christoph Sturm (praes.) / Leonhard Christoph Riederer (resp.), *De ipsa natura* (Altdorf: Schönnerstaedt, 1682); idem, *Idolum naturae, similitumque nominum vanorum ex hominum Christianorum animis deturbandi conatus philosophicus sive de naturae agentis, tum universalis, tum particularis aliorumque cognatorum quasi numinum superstitionis erroneisque conceptibus dissertatio* (Altdorf: Meyerus, 1692); Günter Christoph Schelhammer, *Natura sibi et medicis vindicata sive de natura liber bipartitus* (Kiel: Riechellius, 1697); idem: *De natura libri tres* (Kiel: Riechellius, 1697); idem: *Naturae vindicatae vindicatio* (Kiel: Reuther, 1702); Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, 'De ipsa natura,' in: *Die philosophischen Schriften*, ed. Carl Gerhardt (Berlin: Weidmann, 1875–1890), vol. 4; Andreas Rüdiger, *Physica divina, recta via, eademque inter superstitionem et atheismum media ad utramque hominis felicitatem, naturalem atque moralem ducens* (Frankfurt: Andreae, 1716). See Heribert M. Nobis, 'Die Bedeutung der Leibnizschrift *De ipsa natura* im Lichte ihrer begriffsgeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen', *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 20 (1966), 525–538; G. Baku, 'Der Streit um den Naturbegriff am Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts', *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik* 98 (1891), 162–190; Catherine Wilson, 'De ipsa natura. Sources of Leibniz' Doctrines of Force, Activity and Natural Law', *Studia Leibnitiana* 19 (1987), 148–172; Guido Giglioni, 'Automata Compared: Boyle, Leibniz, and the Debate on the Notion of Life and Mind', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 3 (1995), 249–278.

³⁶ [Christian Gabriel Fischer], *Vernünfftige Gedanken von der Natur, was sie sey: daß sie ohne Gott und seine allweise Beschränkung unmächtig sey, und wie die einige unmittelbare göttliche kraft in und durch die Mittelursachen, nach dem Maaß ihrer verliehenen Wirkbarkeit oder Tüchtigkeit, hie in der Welt alles allein thätig wirke; durch fleißiges Nachsinnen, Ueberlegen und Schließen gefasset, und zur Verherrlichung göttlicher Majestät, auch Förderung wichtiger Wahrheiten*, herausgegeben von einem Ch[ristian]ristlichen G[abriel]ottes F[ischer]reunde. S.l. 1743. Fol. *2r.: 'Es ist bekannt, was für grobe Irrthümer, unendliche Streitigkeiten, unbedachtsame und fast ärgerliche Reden, aus dem missbrauchten Wort:

to his central thesis: that what he calls 'the force' (instead of God) lies outside this world. As he put it, 'The force, which Spinoza discovers in the material world, the most ancient pagans in the light, and the more recent philosophers in evidence from the material world and which they imagine as divisible emanation, I find outside of the material world, complete and exclusive in the immaterial spirit, which created the universe in accordance to his most wise counsel and then populated it with immaterial creatures, the souls.'³⁷ Fischer shares Boyle's and Malebranche's concern that any notion of independent intermediate causes (*causae secundae*) must lead to idolatry. Therefore, all effects on natural phenomena must come directly from God.

Fischer's writings suggest that he straddled the 'radical' and 'conservative Enlightenments', and it is difficult to place him in either camp. Whereas Boyle was the prototype of figure of the conservative Enlightenment (according to James and Margaret Jacob he was part of the 'Newtonian Enlightenment'),³⁸ not least because he was so concerned to protect Christianity and natural philosophy from heterodox influences, including those of a religious-historical kind, it is much harder to pin Fischer down. The German philosopher tries to present himself consciously as a protagonist of the conservative enlightenment, as a defender of anti-idolatrous natural philosophy, but he uses this context—or pretext—to preserve as much of Spinoza's philosophy as possible.

Such tactics happen at particular times, and they were especially common in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. In the 1660s, as we have seen, Stubbe presented himself as defender of Greatrakes the miracle worker and only implicitly led his readers to naturalist conclusions. Because men like Stubbe and Fischer resorted to such strategies and to implicit arguments, it can be difficult to distinguish clearly between

Natur in die Welt geflossen; und sie gleichsam überschwemmet haben. Dieses wilde Wasser habe ich nunmehr vierzig Jahr befahren, und dabey nach der rechten Quelle gesunder Erkenntniß mich vielfältig umgesehen.' On Fischer see Martin Mulsow, 'Der Wolffianer Christian Gabriel Fischer und seine *Vernünftigen Gedanken über die Natur*', to appear in: Jürgen Stolzenberg (ed.), *Christian Wolff und die europäische Aufklärung* (in print).

³⁷ *Vernünftige Gedanken*, fol. *2v.: 'Die Kraft welche Spinoza in der Welt; die ältesten Heiden im Licht; die neuesten Weltweisen im Weltzeuge suchen; und als einen theilbaren Ausfluß ihnen vorstellen; finde ich außer der Welt, außer dem Weltzeuge, einig und allein in dem zeuglosen Geist, welcher nach seiner höchstweisen Angabe das Weltgebäude verfertigt, und mit zeuglosen Geschöpfen, das sind Seelen, besetzt hat.'

³⁸ Margaret C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution 1689–1720* (Sussex, 1976); eadem, *The Radical Enlightenment. Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London, 1981).

positions of 'radical Enlightenment' and 'conservative Enlightenment'. Certainly we should avoid jumping to quick conclusions from ambiguous statements, a mistake often made by theologians at the time for their own polemical purposes. I feel that it is important in such cases to distinguish clearly between the point of view of the person in question and the reactions of others to it, between self-ascription and ascription by others. 'Intellectual consequences of religious heterodoxy'—that would have been Boyle's diagnosis of Stubbe, whose theological beliefs not only led him into what Boyle thought was religious error, but also to conclusions which were unsustainable from a scientific point of view. One could take a different view of Stubbe, focusing instead on the religious consequences for Stubbe of his intellectual heterodoxy—his sympathies for Islam—or on the political consequences of his religious heterodoxy—his republicanism.³⁹ The line I have taken, however, spells out the connections between religious orthodoxy, the hermeneutics of idolatry, and the continuing anxiety of influence felt throughout the early modern period.

Stubbe would not have agreed with Boyle's diagnosis. Indeed, he may have replied that his friend and patron himself suffered the 'scientific consequences of too much religious orthodoxy,' and Stubbe would have had even harsher words to say about the political consequences of religious orthodoxy. If one only takes the criticism of priestcraft from Herbert of Chisbury to Blount and Toland, it becomes clear that it could easily be translated into the language of idolatry. This leads to works such as Blount's *Great is Diana of the Ephesians, or the Original of Idolatry* (1680), with its biting genealogy of modern priesthood through the lens of the ancient abuses of sacrifice and idol worship.⁴⁰ This means that, from a religious-political point of view, the charge of idolatry—and with it the charge of religious heterodoxy—could also have been made by protagonists of the radical Enlightenment against religious orthodoxy. The hermeneutics of idolatry becomes therefore a double-edged sword. Idolatry was, to be sure, always an error ascribed to others, never a term of self-ascription, but the charge of idolatry could, modelled in the right way, be used by both sides, by the naturalists just as much as by the conservative Enlightenment or religiously orthodox.

³⁹ [Henry Stubbe], *An Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometism with the Life of Mahomet*, ed. Hafiz Mahmud Khan Shairani (London, 1911); see Jacob, *Stubbe*, 25–40; 64–77; Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken. The Church of England and its Enemies 1660–1730* (Cambridge, 1992).

⁴⁰ Charles Blount, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians, or the Original of Idolatry* (London: s.n., 1680).

HETERODOXY AND SINOLOGY: ISAAC VOSSIUS, ROBERT HOOKE, AND THE EARLY ROYAL SOCIETY'S USE OF SINOLOGY

William Poole

I

China for European scholars from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries exemplified the notion of heterodoxy: for here was a kingdom that was heterodox in the purest sense, literally a place 'of another teaching'. The Jesuit China Mission communicated detailed knowledge of China back to the west where it was eagerly consumed by arm-chair scholars of all Christian denominations, but the Jesuits in the field faced a more practical problem: how could they promote Christianity to a culture that seemed supremely confident in its own intellectual and religious achievements? This provoked a crisis of accommodation, the Rites Controversy, resulting eventually in the 1704 decree of Clement XI, forbidding the participation of Chinese Christians in ceremonies honouring Confucius, or involving ancestor-worship. This was reaffirmed in papal bulls of 1715 and 1742. The religious, intellectual, and artistic movement subsequently known as 'figurism' had failed; and the Jesuit Mission in China collapsed. The blame here rests on the Papacy, not on the Chinese Emperor, Kangxi, who had officially endorsed the now anathematised Jesuit accommodationist view. Kangxi, indeed, was extremely annoyed at this new turn of events, memorably describing one papal messenger, Bishop Maigrot, as 'a sinner against the Catholic teaching and a rebel to China.'¹ Back in the west, the question of how, or how far, to accommodate Chinese heterodoxy was a problem too, not only for those directly embroiled in Jesuit politics, but for all scholars contemplating and assessing the alien cultural achievements of the Chinese.

What was heterodox about China? First, China looked like a monarchy, but was in practice governed not by an aristocracy, but by—so western accounts claimed—a scholar-class, appointed on the basis of intellectual

¹ The most recent study is Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China 1579–1724* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2007), esp. 164–203; Kangxi is quoted from Jonathan Spence, *Emperor of China: Self-Portrait of K'ang-hsi* (London, 1974), 80.

merit. Secondly, China apparently boasted the longest uninterrupted cultural and scholarly tradition of any nation in the world, and yet Chinese learning seemed in many respects at odds with western learning, for instance in the areas of medicine and physics. Additionally, Chinese chronology in some versions extended before the orthodox western dating of the Flood, or even of the Creation itself. This was to prove important for supporters of non-Vulgate chronologies in the west. Next, there was the connected problem of Chinese religion: what was its relation to natural religion, and did it preserve an original Noachic tradition, equal or superior to its European counterpart? Finally, what was the mysterious Chinese language and what part had it played in the preservation of Chinese learning?

In this chapter I present a case study of this problem in the Protestant world, one that may suggest some interesting ways for thinking about the relationship between heterodoxy, language and human history in the early modern period. I discuss the reactions to Chinese scholarship and language in the milieu of the early Royal Society of London, and in particular by two early Fellows, the controversial philologist and natural philosopher Isaac Vossius (1618–89), and the greatest experimentalist of the age, Robert Hooke (1635–1703). But first I consider the influence upon such men of the sinological work of the frustrated architect John Webb (1611–72). He himself never became a Fellow of the Royal Society, but his eccentric *An Historical Essay Endeavoring a Probability that the Language of the Empire of China is the Primitive Language* (1669) nevertheless provoked several reactions among the early fellows. His thesis was certainly not endorsed by all who read it, but he posed a number of rather heterodox research questions that, as we shall see, elicited some equally heterodox answers.

II

John Webb's *An Historical Essay Endeavoring a Probability that the Language of the Empire of China is the Primitive Language* (1669) represented the most extreme fantasy concerning Chinese, but it was promulgated by Webb not without some success.² It was posthumously reissued in 1678

² John Webb, *An Historical Essay Endeavoring a Probability that the Language of the Empire of China is the Primitive Language* (London, 1669). The section pertaining specifically to the language comprises pages 145–212. On Webb see John Bold, *John Webb: Architectural theory and practice in the seventeenth century* (Oxford, 1989); Rachel Ramsey,

under the title *The Antiquity of China*, and a very extensive revised manuscript version answering initial objections to his first impression survives.³ Webb's thesis of the ultimate antiquity of Chinese is at least contextually intelligible: not only did Webb associate his own architectural philosophy with the notion of cultural longevity and persistence best evinced by the Chinese, but he saw in the Chinese polity an ideal to assuage his own political disappointments. Webb was the disciple of the architect Inigo Jones (1573–1652), and one of his other publications was *A Vindication of Stone-Heng Restored* (1665), in which he supported Jones' notorious thesis—of which Webb himself had been the editor—that Stonehenge was a Roman monument, of the Tuscan order. This taste for detecting ancient order informed his work on Chinese too. Webb argued that Noah had withdrawn from the tribes whose languages were confounded at Babel long before that point in biblical history, and that he had in fact built the Ark in China, landed the Ark in China, and bequeathed to China the language spoken by Adam, preserved to Webb's day in modern China as the *Quonhoa* or courtly language. The *Quonhoa* was concreated with Adam, who then used his wisdom to fit characters to it. These may have been supplemented by 'Fohi', a legendary king of China.

Webb's view of Chinese script was strongly influenced by not only Semedo, but also the Jesuit polymath and hermetist Athanasius Kircher, who unlike Semedo had no direct knowledge of Chinese.⁴ Kircher had produced tables of Chinese 'derivations', classifying characters pictographically and attempting to reconstruct the original signs out of which the modern characters had evolved, linking the language to ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic. But Kircher's historical explanation was rejected by Webb. Kircher thought that the Chinese had descended from wicked Ham and his branch, and had passed through Egypt on the way to China.

'China and the Ideal of Order in John Webb's *An Historical Essay*', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62 (2001), 483–503.

³ The reissue of Webb, however, bespeaks unsold stock rather than renewed demand. Webb's revised manuscript version, in Wells Cathedral and still unpublished, was first noted by Anthony Wood (*Athenæ Oxonienses*, ed. Philip Bliss, 4 vols. (London: Rivington et al., 1813–20), vol. 4, cols. 753–54), and has been studied by John Bold, 'John Webb: Composite Capitals and the Chinese Language', *The Oxford Art Journal* 4 (1981), 9–17. The manuscript comprises 325 folios divided into six books, and was complete by late May 1671. It is thus very much longer than the printed text, but it is unlikely it was much known at the time.

⁴ Alvaro Semedo, *The History of China* (London: John Crook, 1655), pp. 31–5; Athanasius Kircher, *China Monumentis* (Amsterdam: Joannes Jansson à Wæsberge et al., 1667), 225–36.

This explained the apparent similarities between Egyptian hieroglyphs and Chinese script. Webb thought that the Chinese derived directly from Noah and then virtuous Shem, had not moved location, and had hence never been in Egypt. He backed up this view by making the important distinction that whereas the Egyptians employed hieroglyphs to shroud things, the Chinese used them ‘to communicate their *Concepta* to the people’, quite the opposite manoeuvre. Therefore Kircher was wrong to associate the two ‘languages’, because regardless of visual coincidences, they were radically distinct instruments. Webb’s view, as we shall later see, was bound to prove congenial to those Royal Society scholars who sought to revise the artificial language devised by one of the founding figures of the Society, John Wilkins, and published in 1668 as *An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*. These men were interested precisely in devising a complex notation that communicated rather than obscured *concepta*.

Webb’s work was not unprecedented, for in many ways he was simply pushing the ideas of the Jesuit Martino Martini to their logical conclusion.⁵ Martini had suggested the equation of the Chinese legendary king Yao with Noah; and if Chinese Yao was biblical Noah, then perhaps Noah did indeed speak Chinese. Webb developed this synchronisation of sacred and Chinese history, and his work was accordingly taken seriously as an attempt to harmonise world history. His *Historical Essay* was reviewed, cautiously, in the *Philosophical Transactions*.⁶ Later, the Lord Chief Justice Sir Matthew Hale reported the idea that Chinese predated Hebrew script in his widely-read *The Primitive Origination of Mankind* (1677), though without offering much support.⁷ On the other hand, Robert Hooke implicitly accepted aspects of Webb’s hypothesis, as we shall see. The earliest historian of western sinology was also quick to note also the indebtedness to Webb of Isaac Vossius—a man he described as ‘subtle and incredibly bright’ but still ‘crazy and impious’.⁸ Webb in turn was excited by John Wilkins’ very recently published artificial language, which he mentioned three times in his essay, even claiming that wittingly or unwittingly

⁵ See Martini’s influential *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima* (1658).

⁶ *Philosophical Transactions* [hereafter *PT*] 4 (1669), 973–75.

⁷ Sir Matthew Hale, *The Primitive Origination of Mankind* (London: William Shrowsbery, 1677), 135, 148, 163.

⁸ Theophilus Siegfried Bayer, preface to *Museum Sinicum* (St Petersburg, 1730), translated with a valuable commentary in Knud Lundbæk, *T. S. Bayer (1694–1738): Pioneer Sinologist* (London and Malmö, 1986), 39–101, quotation from p. 58.

Wilkins had based the idea of his artificial language on Chinese, even if his script drew from other sources:

And if we should say, that the learned Author of the Philosophical Language lately published hath founded his *Notions* chiefly on the *Principles of This* [Chinese language], we should not happily say amiss; though for the form of his Character, he hath followed rather the *Gothique* or *Runique* of old.⁹

Also in 1669, the gardening FRS John Beale—in a typically excitable mood—wrote to his fellow gardening FRS John Evelyn that Webb's account of Chinese suggested that it might function as 'an universal Language if not also a Real Character, & perhaps easier & more like to passe current'.¹⁰ The connection between Chinese and Wilkins' real character was made again by the cryptologist John Falconer in 1685, at a point of heightened speculation on such matters.¹¹

Webb's understanding of how Chinese actually worked was, however, shaky. Most considered western judgments since the late sixteenth century, contrary to what one might expect, had criticised Chinese script as too copious, too hard to remember, and hence quite literally a waste of time. The most influential such account was that of the sixteenth-century Jesuit José Acosta, who had praised instead the western invention of the alphabet.¹² Webb inevitably turned round this judgment, placing 'significative' above mere 'alphabetary' notation:

By the Alphabetary kind, as with us, and other nations, aswel in the East, as other parts of the World, the Vulgar come vulgarly to know whatever action is performed: But by the significative, those especially I mean, that involved mystically the whole conception of some certain matter, the Vulgar came to know nothing, but what vulgarly befitted them for to know.

Webb had kept abreast of recent scholarship on the Chinese language. He was aware of the claim that the script is built up from nine strokes (fifteen are recognised today); he was aware of the tones, and of the Jesuit Diego Pantoja's influential system of diacritics to distinguish the tones for western learners; he was aware that nouns and verbs (to adopt western

⁹ Webb, *Essay*, 146, and compare 164, 187.

¹⁰ British Library, MS Add. 78312, fol. 105r–v (14 July 1669). Compare Beale's undated claims for his own artificial language (*Hartlib Papers* 67/22/18B).

¹¹ John Falconer, *Cryptomenysis Patefacta* (London: Daniel Browne, 1685), p. 110. Here we might note too that by the 1680s the recusant astronomer Richard Towneley owned two copies of the 1669 edition (A–Z catalogue at Bodleian MS Rawlinson Q b 3, under 'W').

¹² José Acosta, *The Naturall and Morall Historie of the East and West Indies* (London: Edward Blount and William Apsley, 1604), 438–44.

grammatical classes) were interchangeable; and he was aware of the theory that the script was in origin an intentional construct. But he misread the Jesuits Trigault and Semedo on the nature of the characters themselves, stating in a particularly unfortunate paragraph that:

Furthermore the *Chinois* are never put to that irksome vexation of searching out a *Radix* for the derivation of any of their words, as generally all other Nations are; but the *Radix* is the word, and the word the *Radix*, and the syllable the same also, as *Trigautius* hath long since affirmed...

Chinese, according to Webb, lacked any conjugations or declensions; their words never altered from the original stem or radix. Webb assumed that this absence of grammatical forms meant simply that 'the light of Nature' guided the Chinese in their syntax, failing to recognise the importance of word order: 'But it was Nature that from God taught them their Language, and it was the God of Nature, that by *Noah* taught them their Theology.'¹³ This final quotation highlights the theological root of the topic: Chinese was God's language, and from it one could learn something of God's design in Creation. Pondering the hexagrams of the *Yi Jing*, this was the conclusion to which the philosopher Leibniz too would come four decades later:

Fohi, the most ancient prince and philosopher of the Chinese, had understood the origin of things from nothing, i.e. his mysterious figures reveal something of an analogy to Creation, containing the binary arithmetic (and yet hinting at greater things) that I rediscovered after so many thousands of years...¹⁴

III

Webb's 1669 work was a major spur to the construction of English sinology in the later decades of the seventeenth century, an activity that peaked in the 1680s. In particular, the scholars of the early Royal Society had pronounced interests in orientalisms of all varieties. The publications of the Dutch merchant and VOC entrepreneur Andreas Cleyer, the VOC physician Willem Ten Rhijne, and (posthumously) the Polish Jesuit Michal Boym in these years prompted scrutiny of Chinese medicine, particularly

¹³ Webb, *Essay*, 192, 193.

¹⁴ G. W. Leibniz, *Writings on China*, tr. with an introduction, notes and commentaries by Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 1994), 73. On Leibniz and China see most recently Franklin Perkins, *Leibniz and China: A Commerce of Light* (Cambridge, 2004).

the alien practices of acupuncture, moxibustion (i.e. the therapeutic practice of burning moxa or another substance on or next to the skin), and pulse medicine.¹⁵ This was the culmination of over a decade of occasional discussion, however. Books on China were reviewed from the earliest years of the *Philosophical Transactions*, and in 1669 its editor Henry Oldenburg also published 'Some Observations Concerning Iapan', including medical information.¹⁶ An English translation of a dialogue by a Dutch VOC physician on the cure of gout through moxibustion was published in 1676 by Moses Pitt, a printer with very close links to the Society, wherein the Chinese origins of the practice were attested. Pitt even stocked moxa in his bookshop, sold with a paper on how to burn it properly.¹⁷ Pitt had probably finished printing this translation by late 1675, as his close acquaintance Robert Hooke recorded in his memoranda in early December of that year that in a meeting of the Society he 'Discoursed also of the new way of curing the gout by the China Moxa, that Moxa to be a spunk [i.e. a fungus].' Hooke then 'Shewd the experiment of it', presumably demonstrating upon himself.¹⁸ The interest of the Royal Society in such matters persisted into the 1680s, when Willem Ten Rhijne corresponded with the Society, and his work reanimated discussions on moxa and on pulse-medicine. At a meeting in early 1682, Ten Rhijne's account was presented by Theodore Haak, and then sifted by fellows including Christopher Wren, Robert Hooke, Thomas Henshaw, and Frederick Slare.¹⁹ As a result Ten Rhijne's own essays on arthritis, acupuncture, and other medical topics were published not in the Low Countries but in London, and by the Royal Society's printer.²⁰ In a remark that will become pertinent for my later

¹⁵ Harold J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven, 2007), 361–77.

¹⁶ *PT* 2 (1666–67), 484–88 (review of Kircher); *PT* 4 (1669), 973–75 (review of Webb); *PT* 4 (19 July 1669): 983–86 (on Japan), observation 8.

¹⁷ Herman Busschof and Henry Van Roonhuyse, *Two Treatises, the one medical, of the Gout . . . the other partly Chirurgical, partly Medical* (London: Moses Pitt, 1676), esp. 73–5, sg. Z7r (advert).

¹⁸ H. W. Robinson and W. Adams, eds., *The Diary of Robert Hooke M.A., M.D., F.R.S. 1672–1680* (London, 1935), 197 (2 December 1675).

¹⁹ Henry Oldenburg, *The Correspondence*, ed. A. R. Hall and M. B. Hall. 13 vols. (Madison and Milwaukee (vols. 1–9); London (vols. 10–11); London and Philadelphia (vols. 12–13), 1965–86), vol. 13, 368; Thomas Birch, ed., *The History of the Royal Society of London for Improving of Natural Knowledge*, 4 vols. (London, 1756–57), vol. 4, 119–20 (meeting of 18 January 1682).

²⁰ Willem Ten Rhijne, *Dissertatio de Arthridite: Mantissa Schematica: De Acupunctura: et Orationes Tres* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1683).

discussion of Vossius, Wren suspected that the (European) ancients had known of this primal medical wisdom too:

...he was of opinion that the antients might know and make more use of the information of the pulse than our modern physicians of Europe; and that there might be more [to] GALEN'S curiosity about pulses than was at present understood.²¹

We shall encounter again the notion that Chinese civilisation may have preserved hypotheses now lost or garbled in the west.

Chinese language and philosophy also fascinated the Royal Society. In late 1685 Henri Justel was informing the Society that Père Couplet had sent back 124 volumes from China; and in that year and the next the minor FRS and Africa Company merchant Arthur Bailey presented the Society with letters in 'Chinese' script. Bailey was fascinated by the intricacy of the characters, detecting 18 to 24 pen-strokes in some characters.²² In that year too another minor FRS, Nathaniel Vincent, finally published a 1674 sermon that in an appendix contained what has recently been recognised as the first snatch of Confucius to appear in English, translated from a Chinese-Latin Jesuit publication. Vincent also revealed that two of his colleagues were contemplating a complete translation of Confucius, and by context these FRSs were almost certainly Robert Hooke and his linguist friend Francis Lodwick.²³ Lodwick himself had owned Chinese books since the 1650s and supplied examples to both John Wilkins and Robert Hooke for their publications; these papers were subsequently destroyed in the Great Fire, as both Wilkins and Hooke lamented.²⁴ In around 1677 their friend and colleague John Aubrey had attempted to secure for the Royal Society's library the philosophical manuscripts of the London-based

²¹ Birch, *History*, vol. 4, 120; Wren is surely remembering Vossius, *De poematum cantu* (London: Robert Scott, 1673), 68: 'Among the ancients whose works survive, no one investigated this matter [of pulse medicine] more extensively than Galen, who published fifteen books on the nature and variations of the pulse. The diligence of this man is altogether to be praised, who was attempting to reduce to a more certain method an obscure matter and one involved in many difficulties; but if you should read all those books, you would find a great deal of notable material, but it will be admitted that much more survives that provokes, rather than satisfies, one's curiosity.'

²² Birch, *History*, vol. 4, 426 (4 November 1685), 370 (25 February 1685), 489 (16 June 1686).

²³ Nathaniel Vincent, *The Right Notion of Honour* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1685), second pagination, pp. 15–25; Matthew Jenkinson, 'Nathaniel Vincent and Confucius's 'Great Learning' in Restoration England', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 60 (2006), 35–47.

²⁴ *The Hartlib Papers*, 29/5/50A.

Dutch merchant James Boevey, one of which was a 'Life of Cum-fu-zu'. Alas this too is now lost.²⁵ In 1685 Hooke lectured on the Chinese abacus, and the following year, as we shall later discuss in detail, he turned to the Chinese language. Next year, 1687, the Paris Jesuit partial edition of Confucius, the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, was published prefaced by the controversial Jesuit interpretation of Chinese religion and its origins. This publishing event was so widely discussed that James II would ask for the celebrated book upon his visit to the Bodleian in September of that year; and Bodley's Librarian Thomas Hyde could already produce the library's copy.²⁶ James' request was topical, for only a few weeks prior to the royal visit, Hyde had entertained in the library the first Chinese visitor to England capable of conversing, the young Christian convert Shen Fuzong. Shen stayed for a few weeks in order to catalogue the Bodleian's Chinese books, and of course London high society had heard all about him too; Sir Godfrey Kneller painted him for the king's own privy chamber.²⁷ Hyde and Shen corresponded, and after Shen had finished his cataloguing, Hyde sent him off to London and to the aristocratic chemist and FRS Robert Boyle, with a letter of introduction.²⁸ But Boyle had already met Shen in London earlier that year, and had questioned him about sinological matters:

The Chinois I was visited by yesterday, told me in answer to some Questions I made him, 1. That y^e number of their Characters was really incredibly great, &

²⁵ Bodleian Library, MS Aubrey 7, fol. 13v (list of Boevey's works, c. 1677). The much more accessible text of the life of Confucius included in the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* was published too late for Boevey, who presumably therefore translated this from the Chinese/Latin version included in Intorcetta's *Sapientia Sinica* (Jianchiang, 1661), or from the revised version in Intorcetta's *Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis* (Goa, 1669), both extremely rare books in Europe. Confucius himself partially made it into English in 1691; this unsigned translation was based not directly on the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* but on an intermediary French digest, is intellectually unambitious, and unlikely to have been connected to the Royal Society milieu (*The Morals of Confucius* (London: Randal Taylor, 1691)).

²⁶ Bodleian Library, MS Wood D 19 (3), fols. 87v–88r.

²⁷ Theodore N. Foss, 'The European Sojourn of Philippe Couplet and Michael Shen Fuzong, 1683–1692', in Jerome Heyndrickx, (ed.), *Philippe Couplet, S.J. (1623–1693): the man who brought China to Europe* (Nottetal, 1990), 121–40; Nicolas Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity in China. Volume One: 635–1800* (Leiden, 2001), 450.

²⁸ A handful of letters from Shen to Hyde survive in Hyde's Latin-Chinese collection, MS Sloane 853. These were transcribed in a garbled form by Sharpe in Hyde, *Syntagma Dissertationum*, ed. G. Sharpe, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1767), vol. 2, 516–21 ('Accipi binas litteras' (p. 517) is actually the start of a separate letter, but obscured by Sharpe's layout; numbering Sharpe's letters 1–7, the correct order is really 4, 3, 5, 1, 7, 2, 6). Hyde to Boyle, in Robert Boyle, *The Correspondence of Robert Boyle*, ed. Michael Hunter, Antonio Clericuzio, and Lawrence Principe, 6 vols. (London, 2001), vol. 6, 226 (letter of 26 July 1687).

yt He himself was Master of between 10 & 12 thousand of them. 2. That y^e language of y^e Mandarins (or Magistrates) was very different from yt of y^e Common people, & also from yt of y^e Clergy, & some of y^e Literati: insomuch yt few understood y^e Mandarins Language, or could make any use of it; thô, for his part, He had made some progress in it.²⁹

Boyle himself had gifted a Chinese almanac to the Bodleian in 1671; and John Wallis, FRS and Savilian Professor of Geometry confidently but improbably claimed in 1686 to be able to decipher it, drawing on the previous work of the astronomer and orientalist John Greaves (1602–1652) and the great Leiden orientalist Jacobus Golius (1596–1667).³⁰

Royal Society sinophilia was not however uncritical. As sinophilia spread throughout general literary culture, its usefulness for what would later be termed as the stance of the ‘ancients’ against the ‘moderns’ grew apparent, as witnessed by Sir William Temple’s 1690 panegyric upon Chinese cultural achievement.³¹ This drew the famous rebuttal of William Wotton, philologist and FRS, who branded the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* as ‘an incoherent Rhapsody of moral Sayings’, and derided Chinese medicine simply by reproducing in translation particularly incredible sections from Cleyer’s *Specimen Medicinæ Sinicæ* (1682). The Chinese may ‘be excellent Empiricks, as many of the *West-Indian* Salvages are’, he stated, but are in no sense ‘tolerable Philosophers’.³² In an earlier letter to Boyle, Thomas Hyde, reacting to Vossius on pulse-medicine, concurred: he saw ‘little in it but an heap of irrational directions; and indeed could not be expected to be much otherwise from a people wholly ignorant of anatomy, which can only give light in this philosophy . . . they have luckily hit upon some things, which are very pretty . . . but their account of it [i.e. the circula-

²⁹ Royal Society, Boyle Papers 21, 288 (4 May 1687) [emendations: ‘told me in’ replaces MS ‘told me by in’; ‘& 12’ for ‘& [interlinear:] 12’].

³⁰ Bodleian Library, Sinica 57 (= *Summary Catalogue* 3997), copy marked ‘*Calendarium* Chinense impressum, / Bibliothecae dono dedit vir Honoratissimus / Divus Robertus Boyle, anno 1671’ (the other identifications in Chinese and romanised Chinese are in Shen’s hand); Birch, *History*, vol. 4, 504. See Royal Society, EL/W2/41 (8 November 1686) for the original letter. On Golius see the learned essay of J. J. L. Duyvendak, ‘Early Chinese Studies in Holland’, *T’oung P’ao* 32 (1936), 293–344. A list of provenanced Chinese books in Europe in the seventeenth century is maintained by David Helliwell of the Bodleian Library at: <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/users/djh/17thcent/17theu.htm>

³¹ Sir William Temple, *Miscellanea. The Second Part* (London Ri. and Ra. Simpson, 1690), 21–4, 164–96.

³² William Wotton, *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (London: Peter Buck, 1694), 144–53.

tion of the blood] is somewhat monstrous'.³³ Wotton too was reacting not just to Temple but to voices within the Royal Society itself: Wotton explicitly attacked Vossius' sinophilia, and he stated that his *Reflections* were written chiefly to confute the doctrine of the eternity of the world; a hypothesis typically argued, so he claimed, by recourse to the long Chinese chronology, or to geological catastrophism. This latter theory, as we shall see, was precisely that being developed in Hooke's ongoing geological lectures throughout these decades.

IV

As Wotton insinuated, the most outrageous sinological publication by an FRS in these years was Isaac Vossius' 1685 essay 'De artibus & scientiis Sinarum', following in his collection of essays a piece on the stupendous magnitude of Chinese cities, a *topos* of travellers' accounts since the middle ages. It is Vossius' essay on the Chinese arts and sciences that will concern us next.³⁴

Vossius proposed Chinese learned culture as the greatest and oldest in the world. He discussed the Chinese arts and sciences one by one, and in almost every case, Chinese achievement revealed European failure. The Chinese have unparalleled medical knowledge: their pulse-medicine makes urinoscopy irrelevant; they can diagnose from the tongue alone; they practise arts unknown in the west, such as acupuncture; and they have known about the circulation of the blood for over four thousand years. Their knowledge of medicinal plants and their surgical techniques are unsurpassed. Their chemistry is at least 2,000, perhaps even 4,600 years old. In mechanics, architecture, music, painting, acting, and handicrafts, they excel. The symbol of all of this is their Great Wall, a construction that renders Babylonian, Egyptian, or Roman feats puny in comparison. Nor will Vossius mention their porcelain towers, 1000 feet high—again common exaggerations from the literature behind his account—nor their giant bridges. Even things we might interpret as defects are not so, Vossius

³³ Thomas Hyde to Robert Boyle, 14 July 1683, in *Correspondence of Robert Boyle*, 5, p. 416.

³⁴ Isaac Vossius, *Variorum Observationum Liber* (London: Robert Scott, 1685), 56–68 ('De magnis Sinarum urbibus'), 69–85 ('De artibus et scientiis Sinarum'), no further references given. On Vossius in England see with caution D. S. Katz, 'Isaac Vossius and the English biblical critics 1650–1689', in R. H. Popkin and A. Vanderjagt, eds., *Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 1993), 142–84.

argues: if the Chinese employ no shading in their paintings, that is because they can distinguish the near and the far by their treatment of line alone. Printing, of course, had been employed by the Chinese 1,500 years before reaching Christian Europe, and their version of it is still superior to ours. The use of magnetism in navigation must have been understood by the ancient Chinese too, as they have been exploring other countries by means of it for 2,800 years; only very recently has Christendom learned the art, passed by the Chinese to the Arabs via Sri Lanka, and thence to Christendom.³⁵

Vossius' essay is aggressively heterodox on a first reading. Indeed, he is so unrelenting in his praise that we realise that this essay is best classified as a late example of that uncle of the heterodox, the Renaissance genre of *paradox*: 'Vossius, who delights in Paradoxes', as the non-juring scholar Thomas Baker complained.³⁶ But then on a second reading, perhaps we take a step back. First, Vossius himself had come to his sinophilia in print in 1659 as part of his developing argument in favour of the Greek Septuagint text of the Old Testament, with its stretched chronology, in opposition to the orthodox, shortened chronology of the Hebrew Vulgate.³⁷ The antiquity of the Chinese historical tradition was for Vossius in origin a means to an end, therefore; and this use of the Chinese chronology to promote the Septuagint Bible was a move that was to be commended by Sir William Temple in his 1690 'Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning' too:

... those [records] of *China*, are the oldest, that any where pretend to any fair Records: For these are agreed, by the Missionary Jesuits, to extend so far above Four Thousand Years, and with such Appearance of clear and undeniable Testimonies, that those Religious Men themselves, rather than question their Truth, by finding them contrary to the vulgar Chronology of the Scripture, are content to have Recourse to that of the *Septuagint*, and thereby, to save the Appearances, in those Records of the *Chineses*.³⁸

³⁵ Vossian sinophilia is popular again: Gavin Menzies, 1421: *The Year China Discovered the World* (London, 2002); compare the recently-discovered significance of the Chinese navigational 'Selden Map' in the Bodleian, as announced in the *Oxford University Gazette*, 19 March 2009.

³⁶ Agnieszka Steczowicz, "The Defence of Contraries: Paradox in the Late Renaissance Disciplines" (University of Oxford, unpubl. D.Phil. Thesis, 2004); Thomas Baker, *Reflections upon Learning* (London: A. Bosvile, 1699), 146.

³⁷ Isaac Vossius, *Dissertatio de vera aetate mundi, qua ostenditur natale mundi tempus annis minimum 1440 vulgarem aeram anticipare* (The Hague: Adriaan Vlacq, 1659), esp. 44–48, 'Serum origines explicantur', where it is argued that the Chinese possess writers older than Moses.

³⁸ Temple, *Miscellanea*, 22.

Next, Vossius' essay on the Chinese arts and sciences quickly reveals itself as interested in the cause rather than the effects of Chinese scholarship. Here Vossius takes a clear stance: such scholarship has been successful because the Chinese have preserved what he terms the *perennis literarum usus* and the *perpetuus antiquorum librorum intellectus*. As this suggests, Vossius is really arguing for learned culture, and for a monoglot, supra-regional elite within it. He does not believe that the Chinese are naturally more intelligent than their European counterparts; rather, it is their preservation of a scholarly dialect, and that alone, that guarantees their superiority. Westerners currently enjoy better astronomy and mathematics—which the Chinese have eagerly taken on—but again this is not because we are naturally better at these things, but because we benefit from the learning of the Greeks, who in turn got their knowledge from the Chaldeans and Babylonians. Once more it is antiquity that trumps all else. Vossius the philologist, writing what is really a rather derivative and irritating piece, is in fact implicitly campaigning for the preservation of the *western* scholarly languages, and the retirement of the vernaculars from learned discourse. On a second reading, therefore, Vossius' heterodoxy becomes orthodoxy, and his sinology pseudo-sinology. Against his rather superficial sinophilia, for instance, we may place the poetry composed by the Kanxi emperor in praise of western clockmaking.³⁹

There is, however, a third reading too. First, eastern scholarship *was* ineluctably opposed to western orthodox traditions in almost every area Vossius canvassed, and he himself cannot escape this conclusion. Vossius is careful not to discuss Chinese religion directly, but one implication of his argument should be that China preserves a very old form of natural religion. This, however, was exactly the Jesuit position that was to prove so self-destructive. Moreover, the Chinese historical record presented problems for orthodox biblical criticism; their medicine was in collision with western ideas; so too their taste in fine art; and so forth. Secondly, Vossius also admits that the passage of time has affected China too. The greatness of their ancient statuary, for instance, shows, 'that just as it is with us, so also for the Chinese: with the passage of time, the dignity of arts and knowledge declines'. Ancient music the Chinese mourn as a lost art; nor do they make much of modern music. This mirrors precisely the comments Vossius himself had made in his *De poematum cantu* (1673)

³⁹ The poem is translated in Spence, *Emperor of China*, p. [63].

about the decline in western metrics.⁴⁰ It is credible that this has come about with the Chinese, says Vossius in the later essay, as it has with us, 'through the mutation of speech and language, which with the Chinese, as with us, is flowing and unstable. I have shown elsewhere [again in the *De poematum cantu*]', he adds, 'that this happened to the Greeks too'. Finally, following the Tartar conquest of 1644, China, as many westerners noted, had fallen from her millennial chair of cultural superiority. This fall prompted at least one English drama, and even made it onto an English playing-card in 1677.⁴¹ Vossius' essay, therefore, is tinged with a melancholy counter-narrative, one of mutability and of cultural loss. Even the Chinese *perennis literarum usus* cannot fully stabilise their *literæ*.

Vossius' sinophilia had been in evidence for well over two decades by the appearance of his 1685 essays. But Vossius had long had a reputation for being a contrarian. His claims on the size of Peking were soon queried; Henri Justel informed the Society in 1687 that a Jesuit account translated from the Portuguese was about to appear that contradicted Vossius' speculations.⁴² And as the French Jesuit Philippe Avril later complained of Vossius' Chinese geography, 'Vossius was undoubtedly a great man, and incomparably well read, nay, beyond any other; but at the same time it is undeniable, that the desire of appearing universal, often plung'd him into gross Errors, in taking him out of his Province.'⁴³ But again, perhaps the most subtle reaction to Vossius' conjectures on China came from within the Royal Society.

⁴⁰ Compare Vossius' remarks on western poetics in *De poematum cantu*, 28: 'For almost one thousand years now a barbarous muse reigns everywhere, no longer as once in universities or in the cloisters of monks, but in theatres and the courts of kings, and this muse alone sounds even in the churches, while the proper measure and order of rhythm lies neglected', and see further 94–5, where Chinese comic writing is discussed.

⁴¹ Elkanah Settle, *The Conquest of China by the Tartars* (London: W. Cademan, 1676); Henry Winstanley, *Geographical Playing Cards* (1677, facsimile pack Saffron Walden, 1986), seven of diamonds ('of late years that vnbounded people [the Tartars] has Burst through and subdued & made Tributary this Vast, and Rich, & Populous Realm... their Ingenie in all Arts & Sciences... may make... vs... to Deplore their being Subuerted by so Sauage a People as the Tartars').

⁴² Birch, *History*, vol. 4, 541. The work in question was by the very experienced Jesuit Gabriel de Magalhães, which appeared in English in 1688. On the matter of Chinese language, however, Magalhães in fact endorsed the idea that 'part of the *Chinese* Letters are Hieroglyphicks' and that the 'Language and Letters of the *Chineses* have been invented with a wonderful deal of Contrivance' (Gabriel Magalhães, *A New History of China* (London: Thomas Newborough, 1688), 70, 72).

⁴³ Philippe Avril, *Travels into Divers Parts of Europe and Asia... [and] into China containing many curious remarks in natural philosophy, geography, hydrology and history* (London, 1693), sg. A4v.

V

Enter Robert Hooke, whose 1686 essay on the Chinese *literæ* may be partially read, I suggest, as a reaction to his philological colleague's incendiary essay. Vossius wrote in Latin; Hooke lectured and published in English. Vossius made no effort to assess the rather conventional sinological scholarship he plundered; Hooke went to the trouble of obtaining Chinese word-lists and printed books; of building an abacus; even, with Lodwick, of taking tea with, and trying to talk to, some visiting Chinese merchants in 1693. Hooke recorded in his journal that they didn't have much luck: but he could at least confirm that spoken Chinese was a tonal language.⁴⁴

Vossius's essay, I have argued, was really powered by non-sinological concerns, primarily his conservative advocacy of the *perennis literarum usus* of Greek and Latin. Hooke's motivation, too, was non-sinological in origin. As he opened his essay, 'Whether there ever were any Language Natural, I dispute not: But that there have been, are and may be artificial Languages 'tis not difficult to prove.'⁴⁵ Again, therefore, we encounter John Wilkins' *Essay concerning a Real Character, and an Artificial Language*. Wilkins was Hooke's patron, and Hooke's 'Chinese Characters' lecture grew out of his ongoing work to realise a revision of Wilkins' *Essay* in the 1670s.⁴⁶ But ironically, Wilkins had explicitly denied that Chinese script in its origin had been artificially imposed. Hooke, returning to the ideas of Golius, rejected by Wilkins, reaffirmed this supposed fact against his mentor.⁴⁷ But by emphasising, as we shall see, the *loss* of the original structure of Chinese, Hooke was also registering implicit scepticism about any simple *clavis* to Chinese such as was being touted in the 1680s by the German pseudo-scholar Andreas Müller.⁴⁸ Hooke, attentive to the great complexity of the individual calligraphy of the characters, engages with

⁴⁴ R. T. Gunther, ed., *Early Science in Oxford*, 15 vols. (Oxford: privately printed, 1923–67), vol. 10: [Hooke, memoranda for 31 July 1693].

⁴⁵ R[obert] H[ooke], 'Some Observations, and Conjectures concerning the Chinese Characters', *PT* 180 (1686), 63–78, no further references given. Hooke's essay is a conflation of two lectures; I disregard here his comments on the abacus, which he will have derived from the printed discussions of Smedo and Martini.

⁴⁶ On this project, see primarily Rhodri Lewis, *Language, Mind and Nature: Artificial Languages in England from Bacon to Locke* (Cambridge, 2007).

⁴⁷ John Wilkins, *An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (London: Samuel Gellibrand and John Martyn, 1668), p. 10.

⁴⁸ Donald Lach, 'The Chinese Studies of Andreas Müller', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 60 (1940), 564–75.

such discussions among his Royal Society colleagues, even as he situates his analysis within the ongoing speculations about the development of a workable artificial language.

Hooke's essay focuses on what he perceives as a radical distinction between the effable and the written manifestations of Chinese. Working from Jesuit Chinese publications with interlinear romanised phonetic notation, Hooke is struck by the discontinuity between the complexity of the character and its simple spoken form. This discontinuity prompts Hooke to make a leap of reasoning assisted by his preoccupation with artificial languages: he accepted the Golian hypothesis that court Chinese was at one point artificially constructed and imposed. Hooke conjectured that modern spoken Chinese is a later accretion related to the character only by laborious convention, and that the character itself is all that remains of a now mute language. Chinese script therefore reflects a superior approach to language than its current spoken form. In adopting this interpretation Hooke was denying the claims of Müller for his *clavis*. If the original language represented by the surviving script is lost, and if, on the evidence of that surviving script, it is impossible to be sure what the original status of the language was, then Müller's *clavis* could not even exist. Furthermore, Hooke was also rejecting the view put forward by Philippe Couplet in his *proëmialis declaratio* to the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* that, because the Chinese had shunned commerce right from the origin of their nation, they had preserved their language virtually unchanged since Babel, where it had formed one of the original seventy matrix languages.⁴⁹ He was consequently also rejecting the stance of Webb, and of Vossius, although he did agree with them that Chinese, regardless of the vicissitudes it had suffered, was in origin a very, perhaps the most, ancient language.

Hooke, however, went further, and here we can see finding a voice his interest, shared by his friend Lodwick, who published an essay on the subject in 1686, in instating a new phonology. Having divorced (current) Chinese phonology from (original) Chinese orthography, Hooke then made the bold claim that *all* languages might suffer a divorce over time between their written and spoken forms. In the meeting a week after his lecture Hooke met with stiff opposition to his idea of the instability of the effable forms of languages, with Hooke continuing to assert that Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic, even Greek and Latin may all now be pronounced so differently from their ancient forms as to render current practice indistinguishable

⁴⁹ Knud Lundbæk, 'The Image of Neo-Confucianism in *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44 (1983), 19–30.

from a purely 'Arbitrary' system. Such a claim was bound to cause dissent from an auditory that included academic philologists, notably Thomas Gale. Nevertheless Hooke's views here parallel his insistence throughout the geological work which he was undertaking in this period that there may have been many ancient, philosophically advanced cultures subsequently swept away by natural cataclysm, and of whom we have lost all memory. Hooke therefore hardened Vossius' intermittently observable counter-narrative of cultural loss into a basic historiographical model. He was not impressed with Vossius' dominant notion that permanence of scholarly dialect equals permanence of scholarly memory: in effect, he exploited the contradiction at the heart of Vossius' work, and turned the essay of an ancient into the essay of a modern. It is no coincidence that Hooke's geological work was itself peppered with sinological anecdotes, and this hints towards a coherence to Hooke's later work that has not hitherto been exploited.⁵⁰ It may be noted again that Hooke's Aristotelian view of history as punctuated by periodic floods and earthquakes wiping away contemporary human knowledge is again an implicit attack on, or at least a departure from, John Wilkins, who had denied such periodic catastrophism.⁵¹ Finally, Hooke's own ambivalent statements about the age of the world deepen in their significance when we realise that his friend and linguistic collaborator Francis Lodwick was a secret supporter of the French heretic Isaac La Peyrère, who had argued in print in 1655 that there were men before Adam, and that the world was of extreme, unknowable antiquity. Needless to say, Lodwick did not publish his views, but we know he at least discussed La Peyrère with Hooke, who likewise could not have voiced open support for the heresy.⁵²

To conclude this section, Hooke's practical concern with realising an artificial language dominated the continuation of the 'Chinese Characters' lecture as it had its opening. If, as Hooke maintains, all ancient languages may now be pronounced quite amiss, then this is good grounds for replacing our garbled modern perversions of the ancient tongues with artificially imposed sounds specially designed to erase the 'great many Irregularities and Difficulties of Pronunciation (which are to be found in all Languages

⁵⁰ Robert Hooke, *Posthumous Works*, ed. Richard Waller (London: for the editor, 1705), 137, 328, 343–44, 395, 429–30, 432, 442, 446, 533.

⁵¹ John Wilkins, *Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion* (London: T. Basset et al., 1678 [1675]), 72–6.

⁵² William Poole, 'The Genesis Narrative in the Circle of Robert Hooke and Francis Lodwick', in Ariel Hessayon and Nicholas Keene, *Scripture and Scholarship in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2006), 41–57.

now spoken)'. This would convert ancient tongues into *de facto* artificial languages, not philosophical in the Wilkinsian sense, but at least 'exactly Regular and easy' (in their use and pronunciation) from the point of view of orthoepy, a project also being pursued by Francis Lodwick at this time.⁵³ Hooke therefore asserts that Chinese script might be revocalised by reforming linguists entirely from scratch, but this time following a rational order. In this way, Hooke's 'Chinese Characters' lecture combined two different discussions in a complex and intelligent fashion. Faced with a sudden surge in interest in the origin and intelligibility of Chinese, Hooke developed his own sceptical but inventive model, and one that in its interpretation of the general question of the relevance of ancient culture and language sounds an early note in the complex *querelle* of the 'ancients' and the 'moderns'. Finally, Hooke situated his comments not only within contemporary discussions of oriental scripts but also within the complementary tradition of the search for a workable artificial language. Two decades after his great mentor Wilkins had completed the *Essay*, Hooke was still bending every linguistic discussion he encountered towards the salvaging of at least some aspects of Wilkins' dream, though not quite in the form his mentor had envisaged.

VI

China, to conclude, offered western thinkers various forms of heterodoxy, and I have surveyed the fortunes of some of these forms in the early Royal Society. I have concentrated primarily on the ideas of Isaac Vossius and Robert Hooke, but have also examined their larger circulation in the Society and their indebtedness to the earlier work of John Webb, itself cognisant not only of often very recent Jesuit sinology, but of the Society's own flagship venture for the reformation of language, John Wilkins' *Essay*. These forms of heterodoxy were not all commensurate, to be sure, but they did impact upon one another.

Vossius, I have argued, was a rather uncritical sinophile, and in his celebration of Chinese culture I have detected two strands, not entirely compatible. The first strand of Vossius' sinophilia was really a form of orthodoxy—by praising Chinese culture Vossius was contriving to lament the vernacularisation and modernisation of western academic culture. But

⁵³ These texts are edited in Francis Lodwick, *Writings on Language, Theology, and Utopia*, ed. William Poole and Felicity Henderson (Oxford, 2011).

the second strand of his sinophilia was ineluctably heterodox: Vossius had come to lionise ancient Chinese culture as part of his promotion of Septuagint chronology, a strategy that had been employed (albeit in reverse direction) by the Jesuits for some decades by that point. (More cautious English supporters of the Septuagint typically derided the earliest Chinese history.)⁵⁴ Moreover, Vossius cannot have denied that many of the Chinese arts and sciences were indeed heterodox from a western point of view, and his own work in experimental philosophy, such as his tract on meteorology, *De motu marium et ventorum liber* (1663, English translation 1677), cannot be described as conservative. Vossius is therefore a conflicted figure: a cultural elitist who could nevertheless play a subversive role within scholarly culture itself. On an opposing trajectory, Robert Hooke developed a more imaginative sinophilia, seeing in the accounts of Chinese available to him an opportunity not for sustaining classical scholarship, but for the reform of language itself, as suggested by Wilkins. (I have paralleled this work to Hooke's geological speculations, and it is worth noting too that Hooke and his friend Edmond Halley's complimentary geological speculations were themselves attacked as unbiblical, and by figures within the Royal Society.)⁵⁵ This connection between primeval Chinese and a newly-fashioned artificial language Hooke derived directly not from Wilkins but from John Webb.⁵⁶ And Webb, finally, had proposed full-blown religious heterodoxy in the form of a sinophilia so intense that it diverted biblical history from its Hebraic plains, and returned it to its original Chinese springs.

⁵⁴ For instance, the Astronomer Royal John Flamsteed wrote in a letter to his friend John Smith that the Chinese chronology was merely 'a Cunning Contrivance of the Jesuits to make themselves esteemed by an Ignorant proud people abroad and Such fools in Europe as have not Skill enough to discern betwixt truth and an Impudent Cheat'; but then proceeded to offer careful support for the Septuagint chronology (*The Correspondence of John Flamsteed, the First Astronomer Royal*, ed. Eric Forbes, Lesley Mordin, and Frances Willmoth, 3 vols. (Bristol: Institute of Physics, 1995–2002), vol. 2, p. 888, letter of 1 March 1701).

⁵⁵ See the evidence presented in Simon Schaffer, 'Halley's Atheism and the End of the World', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 32 (1977), 17–40; David R. Oldroyd, 'Geological Controversy in the Seventeenth Century: 'Hooke Vs Wallis' and its Aftermath', in *Robert Hooke: New Studies*, ed. Michael Hunter and Simon Schaffer (Woodbridge, 1989), 207–33.

⁵⁶ Although it must be confessed that the younger John Wilkins was not as sceptical as the older man: John Wilkins, *Mercury, or the Secret and Swift Messenger* (London: John Maynard and Timothy Wilkins, 1641), 106–7. But this was almost certainly before Wilkins had seen any authentic Chinese script.

'LOVERS OF TRUTH' IN PIERRE BAYLE'S AND JOHN LOCKE'S THOUGHT

S.-J. Savonius-Wroth

I

There is something deceptively innocuous about Bayle's and Locke's watchword, 'love of truth'. It recurs throughout their writings but gains prominence from the mid-1680s onwards. It is not a phrase to which students of their thought pay much attention today. Yet the theme of an individual's love of truth is central to the *Commentaire philosophique* of 1686–8, the work which set out Bayle's message of religious toleration most memorably. Undoubtedly a similar theme reverberates through the *Essay concerning human understanding*, first published in 1689, the work which gained Locke an enormous reputation in eighteenth-century Europe. The phrase itself is, however, completely absent from its first edition; only later, in the revised editions, did 'love of truth' become central to Locke's vocabulary. In the second edition of 1694 he styled himself 'a Lover of Truth' and announced that it is 'Truth alone I seek'.¹ Bayle too thought of himself unequivocally as a lover of truth, and no less unequivocally declared that his adversary Pierre Jurieu 'does not love the truth for its own sake. He hates it when it does not conform to his presumptions'.²

From our present-day vantage-point, the aspiration to be a lover of truth will seem either pretty forlorn or merely harmless and uncontroversial. At the time, when Bayle and Locke cast themselves as lovers of truth, they deployed a vocabulary of moral appraisal which was conventional enough to be immediately recognisable to their contemporaries. As Locke himself stated in the fourth edition of the *Essay* in 1699, there was nobody 'in the Commonwealth of Learning, who does not profess himself a lover

¹ John Locke, *An essay concerning human understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1979), epistle to the reader, p. 11; and II.xxi.72, p. 285 (both added to the 2nd edn) [hereafter, '*Essay*'].

² Pierre Bayle, *Addition aux Pensées diverses* (Rotterdam, 1694), qu. in idem, *Pensées diverses sur la comète*, eds. A. Prat and Pierre Rézat (Revised edn, 2 vols., Paris, 1984), II, 5. All translations are my own unless explicitly noted.

of Truth'.³ Authors keen to establish the appropriate ethos often began or ended their books with such professions, especially when they risked incurring their readers' anger by defending views which were at variance with accepted doctrines. For instance, James Tyrrell, Locke's closest intellectual associate during the Exclusion Crisis of 1679–81, published his anonymous *Patriarcha non monarcha* as 'a Lover of Truth'.⁴

A survey of Bayle's and Locke's works and letters will yield many instances of their using the vocabulary of 'love of truth' in this conventional fashion. It defined the 'lover of truth' as 'the Man, who laying aside Party, and Interest, and Prejudice, appears in Controversie so as to make good the Character of a Champion of Truth for Truth's sake'.⁵ If the ideal man would, as Bayle and Locke assumed, fix his mind on truth, his antithesis was a man of pernicious self-love and blind submission to local custom. Bayle's lovers of truth were, not those who loved their 'Pleasures more than the Truth' and pursued their particular interests, 'possess'd by the Love of this World', but those detached from selfishness and attached to God. It was iniquitous 'to cleave to the better Church not from a Love for the Truth, but from worldly Interest, or any other human Consideration'.⁶ The contrast between 'love of truth' and 'love of this world' was commonplace in theological works: it was frequently drawn by Pierre Jurieu, Bayle's patron and colleague at the academy of Sedan and subsequently, in exile, his colleague and enemy at Rotterdam. Jurieu deployed it in order to nerve persecuted Huguenots to hold fast to their faith, instead of converting to Roman Catholicism and becoming false to themselves.⁷

It is, however, essential to recognize that at critical junctures Bayle and Locke inflected the commonplace tropes in far more distinctive and contentious ways, transmuting the conventional ethics of love of truth. They thought hard about two vast questions: First, what does it mean to love truth and what are the character traits and manners—or, to speak in today's terms, what is the moral and social psychology—of a lover of

³ *Essay*, IV.xix.1, p. 697 (4th edn).

⁴ James Tyrrell, *Patriarcha non monarcha* (London, 1681), title-page.

⁵ John Locke, *A second vindication of The reasonableness of Christianity* (London, 1697), p. 478.

⁶ Pierre Bayle, *A philosophical commentary on these words of the Gospel, Luke 14.23, 'Compel Them to Come In, That My House May Be Full'*, eds. John Kilcullen and Chandran Kukathas (Indianapolis, 2005), II.i, p. 141, and IV.xvii, pp. 488–9 and 492–3 [hereafter, '*Commentary*'].

⁷ E.g., Pierre Jurieu, *Examen de l'Eucharistie de l'Eglise Romaine* (Rotterdam, 1682), 53–4; and *Le tableau du Socinianisme* (2 parts, The Hague, 1690), I, 4–5.

truth? How should a lover of truth try to live? And, secondly, in what kind of a society could men aspire to live by the love of truth?

In this chapter I present an account of how Bayle and Locke adopted the widely used and relatively diffuse vocabulary of 'love of truth' in order to discharge specific ideological tasks which were violently controversial. My aim is to explain why the motif of 'love of truth' held an attraction for them, and why it did so just at this particular time—during the crisis of European Protestantism which reached its apex after the Edict of Nantes had been revoked in October 1685—and thus to improve our understanding of what their intellectual enterprises were really about at the close of the seventeenth century. In what follows my principal suggestion will be that the objects of Bayle's and Locke's enterprises were incompatible and incommensurable.

There is an important prerequisite for understanding their enterprises and the clash between them. At the outset it is crucial to recognize the tendency, prominent in western Christianity after the Reformation, to regard the individual believer's personal commitment and adherence to Christ and the truth he revealed (and embodied) more highly than the body of the tradition and the priests' precise ritual and devotional observances, or the life of collective ritual. An increasingly powerful ethics of belief, inspiring both Protestants and Roman Catholics, radiated from the core ideal of personal and inward commitment to truth, which could be deployed as an authoritative standard for assessing the moral health of religious life—and, frequently, of public life.

It is helpful to place Bayle's and Locke's discussions of love of truth in the general context of this ethics of belief which swept western Europe. Still, this is only a prelude to the explanation I seek to offer here of their discussions. In order to understand the clash between them, we need to take note of a crucial divergence within the more specific ethics of love of truth. The source of this division lay with the dialectics of its two key component concepts, *love* (or the action and disposition of the agent who searches after truth) and *truth* (specific object of the agent's belief). On the one hand, the hegemonic account of love of truth was essentialist: Jurieu, for example, wished to unite believers, and to shape society, around *the truth*. It is at this point that menacing implications begin to come to view. As it turns out, the ethics of love of truth, which may seem innocuous enough, could entail a narrowing of the spectrum of acceptable conduct in belief and action, or a concern with the truth which could result in more forceful efforts to control and regulate the forms of conduct of individuals who had no other horizon than their 'love of this world'. Equally,

it could result in a Holy War, or in efforts to impose the truth on those who rejected it publicly even after instruction and exhortation—on those whom Jurieu called corrupt ‘enemies of God and his truth’, recalcitrant due to wickedness of heart and mind.⁸ There was, in Jurieu’s view, no right superior to that of *the absolute truth*.

On the other hand, the same ethics also emphasized the agent’s *disposition* to love truth. In Bayle’s and Locke’s Europe where Christians could not agree about what is the truth, it served to highlight the intensely political questions of the distribution of epistemic authority in society and of how this authority was aligned with the juridical apparatus and penal practices of the church and the state. Who had the requisite degree of authority to know better and impose limits on the claims of others to speak the truth? Did the church have a monopoly over the truth—and which church in particular? The trend here was towards an increasingly fragmentary Christianity, and it conditioned Locke’s famous assertion that every church is ‘orthodox to itself and erroneous or heretical to others’; hence, he argued, the controversy between the Remonstrants and the Anti-Remonstrants ‘about the truth of their doctrines . . . is equal on both sides’.⁹

As we shall see, when Bayle tried to furnish arguments of legitimisation and self-defence for the allegedly ‘erroneous or heretical’ believers who were being bullied, ostracized, or persecuted by the ‘orthodox’, he exploited the conventional language of ‘love of truth’, but bent its rules, placing all the emphasis on the constitutive role of the agent’s intention and disposition. In the *Commentaire* he deployed the uncontroversial argument that God had imposed the duty of loving truth on all believers, but then pressed doggedly towards the ultimate point that no-one qualified to judge whether others were lovers or enemies of truth. A main reason Bayle offered against efforts to impose truth on other believers was that the others, whilst rejecting a particular understanding of the truth, could actually be lovers of truth in equal measure and justified, therefore, in upholding the truth of their own doctrine.¹⁰

Similar non-essentialist and subjectivist arguments provided, as we shall see, the basis for Locke’s defence of religious toleration in the 1680s.

⁸ Jurieu, *Tableau*, 1, pp. 4–5. See also Guy Howard Dodge, *The political theory of the Huguenots of the dispersion: with special reference to the thought and influence of Pierre Jurieu* (New York, 1947), esp. 24–6, 193, and 204.

⁹ John Locke, *Epistola de tolerantia: a letter on toleration*, ed. Raymond Klibansky, trans. J. W. Gough (Oxford, 1968), pp. 80–3.

¹⁰ *Commentary*, II.x, p. 261.

However, whilst the cause of toleration was to remain important to Locke for the rest of his life, in the 1690s he distanced himself more and more from his initial case for it, and struggled instead to sustain an operative distinction between lovers and enemies of truth. What I hope to show in this chapter is that he embarked on a new kind of enterprise in civil philosophy, entirely and radically different from Bayle's, after having assimilated modes of thought that were dominant among the Remonstrants and other 'heterodox' Protestants in the late 1680s. To a great extent, this change of direction may be seen as the intellectual consequence of his immersion in religious 'heterodoxy.'

II

First of all, as a rough approximation of Bayle's and Locke's mutually exclusive claims, I wish to draw attention to the distinctive argument Bayle put forward in the *Commentaire* that it is natural for everyone to love whatever appears to be true: children exhibit 'a physical Perfection'—that is, a natural perfection, as opposed to a moral perfection which would depend on 'free and reasonable Choice'—'to love what they take to be Truth, and hate what they take to be an Error'.¹¹ More than this, Bayle claimed that in the post-lapsarian condition it is impossible that 'a Man shou'd fix his Love and his Zeal on nothing but absolute Truth, known certainly and acknowledg'd for such'. Instead, the fallen man's duty is 'that of searching for the Truth, and of laying hold on that' which appears to be the truth, 'and of loving this apparent Truth'.¹²

By contrast, when Locke invoked the shared terminology in the 1690s, he always insisted—to borrow the expression from Bayle—that man *should* fix his love on nothing but absolute truth. However, few had attempted to do so in the actually existing societies of Locke's Europe: 'the impartial Lovers and Seekers of Truth are a great deal fewer than one could wish or imagine'.¹³ Despite all the protestations of 'love of truth', 'one may truly say, that there are very few lovers of Truth for Truths sake'. In existing society the population's *valentior pars*—especially 'the cassocked tribe'—are 'carried away headlong by the judgement of others "like puppets that

¹¹ *Commentary*, IV.xvi, p. 479.

¹² *Commentary*, II.x, pp. 258–61.

¹³ Locke to Samuel Bold, 16 May 1699, in E. S. de Beer, ed., *The correspondence of John Locke* (8 vols. to date, Oxford, 1976–89), VI, p. 627 [hereafter, 'Correspondence'].

dance when others pull the strings”'.¹⁴ For Locke, love of truth was rare but still within reach even after Adam's Fall and even in a corrupt age which was likely to divert the mind from 'its natural relish of real solid truth'. Man bore a dispositional tendency to love absolute truth in his depths, and it was possible to cultivate love of truth through a rigorous discipline for the mind.¹⁵ Love of truth could be possessed by some but not others; in principle, however, anyone could acquire it through appropriate training and habituation. In a letter of 1703 to Anthony Collins—which became famous posthumously—Locke claimed that love of truth is 'the principal part of humane perfection in this world and the seed plot of all other virtues'.¹⁶ Other virtues hinged on love of truth, which was concerned, not only with the inner life of the mind and self-perfection, but also with public life, with one's behaviour towards others.¹⁷

Locke, then, spoke of the cultivation and training of 'a mind covetous of truth, that seeks after nothing else' as 'our first and great duty';¹⁸ Bayle rejected the ambition to love 'the real Truth' and saw love of 'the reputed Truth' as a natural property, built into human nature and flowing out of it so that there is ambiguity about whether anyone deserves any moral credit for it.¹⁹ Locke presented love of truth as a dynamic ideal which involved self-transformation and self-effacement, 'a rise above oneself' to the sphere of universal truth; Bayle used the Augustinian language of inwardness to articulate how it emanates from within believers and to present an ideal of self-exploration and self-acceptance, an ideal of a man who turns inwards to himself, who 'enters into himself', in order to discover 'inward light', or 'interior truth'.²⁰ The one regarded the work to be

¹⁴ *Essay*, IV.xix.1, p. 697 (4th edn); and Philip van Limborch to Locke, 18/28 Nov. 1697, *Correspondence*, VI, p. 259 (quoting Horace's *Satires*; trans. De Beer). See also Locke to William Molyneux, 8 Mar. 1695, *Correspondence*, v, p. 285, and 15 June 1697, VI, p. 143; and John Locke, 'Of the conduct of the understanding', ed. Paul Schuurman, Ph.D. thesis, University of Keele (2000), §5, p. 156, and §16, p. 162 [cited by the new paragraph and page numbers in Schuurman's edition, the basis of the forthcoming Clarendon Edition of the 'Conduct'].

¹⁵ Locke, 'Conduct', §67, pp. 217–18. Cf. *Essay*, II.xxxii.6, pp. 385–6, on 'the natural tendency of the Mind... towards Knowledge'; and IV.xix.1, p. 697 (4th edn).

¹⁶ Locke to Collins, 29 Oct. 1703, *Correspondence*, VIII, p. 97. See, e.g., Abraham Rees, *The advantages of knowledge, illustrated and recommended in a sermon... April, 1788* (London [1788]), p. 30.

¹⁷ *Essay*, IV.xix.2–12, pp. 698–703 (4th edn).

¹⁸ John Locke, 'Of study', in *The educational writings of John Locke*, ed. and intro. James L. Axtell (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 405–22, at p. 415.

¹⁹ *Commentary*, II.x, p. 259–60; and IV.xv–xvi, pp. 477–83.

²⁰ *Commentary*, I.1, p. 70, and II.vi, p. 207. On Augustine, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity* (Cambridge, 1989), ch. 7.

done as one of purgation, as a cleansing of both man and society, as part of 'the irreconcilable war between truth and falsehood'.²¹ The other wondered whether the price of this war was not too high and viewed the work to be done as one of social pacification, as a liberation of man and society from the extravagant and tyrannical demands of absolute truth.

During the 1690s a central difficulty of Locke's thought was to establish ways of turning men into lovers of truth and, hence, of bringing about nothing less than a fundamental change in human character and behaviour. In this effort Locke was joined by the Arminian scholar Jean Le Clerc, the principal early carrier of his ideas into Continental discussion. By contrast, from the vantage-point of Bayle and his close associate Henry Basnage de Beauval, best known today as the editor of the *Histoire des Ouvrages des Sçavans*, the difficulty lay in persuading men out of harbouring such reconstructive pretensions which defined Locke and Le Clerc's effort and which appeared to be implausible and indeed menacing. This is why, I wish to suggest, the Baylean intellectual enterprise stood in antithesis to the Lockean.

III

The interpretation I offer in this chapter can also be given a polemical edge. Amongst recent commentators, John Marshall has attempted to counter 'the scholarly tendency . . . to emphasize the distances separating Bayle and Le Clerc, and Locke and Bayle' by stressing 'their mutual commitment to toleration'.²² There can be no doubt at all about the substantial overlap between their enterprises. Working in the Dutch Republic, living in the midst of the Huguenot *Refuge*, all three thought hard, and felt deeply, about the French Protestants' grim experience of being persecuted for alleged heresy. Significantly, however, they were equally concerned for those who sought refuge from the intolerant hegemony of Calvinism, or of High-Church Anglicanism. If we discuss their concerns against the backcloth of Louis XIV's Counter-Reformation alone, we will miss, as Marshall and other scholars have shown, another strand of the story of their tolerationism, their sense of the threat posed by Protestants who attempted

²¹ Adapted from Locke, 'Of study', p. 418.

²² John Marshall, *John Locke, toleration and early Enlightenment culture: religious intolerance and arguments for religious toleration in early modern and 'early enlightenment' Europe* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 500–1 and *passim*.

to suppress heterodox deviations from the dogmatic norm and police the faith of their Protestant brethren.²³

After 1685 Bayle, Le Clerc, and Locke knew that they could form a tolerationist alliance against the Huguenot theologians who championed the rigorous Dordrecht Canons of 1619 and harried dissenters—especially against Jurieu. They were all ‘upon the bones of Jurieu, that fals foute’.²⁴ In 1689 Beauval’s journal included a favourable review of Locke’s *Epistola de tolerantia*, composed, almost certainly, during the winter months following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes; and in 1691 Bayle sought Le Clerc’s succour in his polemic against Jurieu.²⁵ There is, then, much that is extremely valuable in Marshall’s line of argument; but it is also in need of qualification, if only because it leaves Marshall ill-equipped to explain with precision why there emerged sharp divisions of opinion between Bayle’s and Locke’s circles, and why their tolerationist unity shattered so spectacularly as soon as Jurieu’s grip on the *Refuge* began weakening in the late 1690s.

Most commentators have attempted to capture the tension between their two circles by discussing the sorts of reasons they offered for religious toleration, and their credentials as forerunners of modernity. For instance, in his comparative investigation of their views, Thomas M. Lennon has concluded that ‘Bayle’s position is in the end the more interesting one’ because Bayle was more successful in grasping the modern category of toleration.²⁶ In the best-known recent assessment of the distance sepa-

²³ Robin D. Gwynn, ‘Disorder and innovation: the reshaping of the French Churches of London after the Glorious Revolution’, in Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan I. Israel, and Nicholas Tyacke, eds., *From persecution to toleration: the Glorious Revolution and religion in England* (Oxford, 1991), 251–73, esp. p. 259; John Marshall, ‘Huguenot thought after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes: toleration, “Socinianism”, integration and Locke’, in Randolph Vigne and Charles Littleton, eds., *From strangers to citizens: the integration of immigrant communities in Britain, Ireland and Colonial America, 1550–1750* (Brighton and Portland, Oregon, 2001), pp. 383–96, esp. p. 384; Walter Rex, *Essays on Pierre Bayle and religious controversy* (The Hague, 1965), pp. 177 and 244–5; and S.-J. Savonius, ‘The role of Huguenot tutors in John Locke’s programme of social reform’, in Anne Dunan-Page, ed., *The religious culture of the Huguenots from 1660 to 1789* (Aldershot, Hampshire, 2006), 137–62.

²⁴ Benjamin Furl to Locke, 16/26 Oct. 1690, *Correspondence*, IV, p. 147.

²⁵ Henry Basnage de Beauval, ed., *Histoire des Ouvrages des Sçavans* (24 vols., Rotterdam, 1687–1709), Sept. 1689, art. II, pp. 20–6 [hereafter, ‘HOS’]. Bayle to Le Clerc, 6 June 1691, in Maria Grazia and Mario Sina, eds., *Jean Le Clerc: Epistolario* (4 vols., Florence, 1987–97), II, pp. 56–7. See also Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, ‘Saintes’, remark F, in idem, *Political writings*, ed. and trans. Sally L. Jenkinson (Cambridge, 2000), p. 236.

²⁶ Thomas M. Lennon, ‘Bayle, Locke, and the metaphysics of toleration’, in M. A. Stewart, ed., *Studies in seventeenth-century European philosophy* (Oxford, 1997), 177–95, at p. 177.

rating them, Jonathan Israel has emphasized that 'Locke's toleration is grudging' and narrow in its scope. Bayle was a key philosopher of the Spinozistic radical Enlightenment, Locke a pillar of the Christian moderate Enlightenment.²⁷

It seems to me that we could think of their endeavours in diametrically opposite terms, with a focus on Locke's 'radical' reconstructive pretensions. What I try to show in this chapter, however, is that it is best to consider Locke's aims incompatible with Bayle's in such a way that it is difficult for us to characterize one of them as obviously more radical. For their followers, their works presented not a choice between a moderate and a radical mentality so much as a choice between two rival solutions to the same challenge, each 'radical' in its own way. Their works articulated two irreconcilable views of how to remedy the ills of their own civilisation.

IV

Whilst in France in 1675–9, Locke began paying serious attention to the problem of truth-telling as a political activity. What appears to have had a great impact on him was his witnessing sessions of Languedoc's provincial estates at Montpellier and learning from the deputies about the humiliating conditions of dependence under which they were acting. In his travel journal he recorded the travesty of the deputies' being encouraged to speak truth to power freely and frankly.²⁸ In reality, as everyone knew, the deputies could only pretend to speak freely, for they needed to avoid the king's displeasure at all costs and devote themselves to pleasing his agents. They could not use, in other words, the power of classical *parrhesia*, which Locke defined in the *Essay* as 'Boldness', as 'the Power to speak or do what we intend, before others, without fear or disorder'.²⁹

²⁷ Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: philosophy and the making of modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001), 11 and 265–7.

²⁸ Locke's journal entries for 23 Nov. 1676 and 7 Mar. 1677, in *Locke's travels in France, 1675–1679, as related in his journals, correspondence and other papers*, ed. John Lough (Cambridge, 1953), pp. 115 and 132. See also his entry for 27 Mar. 1677, *ibid.*, pp. 136–7.

²⁹ *Essay*, II.xxii.10, p. 293. On *parrhesia*, see David Colclough, *Freedom of speech in early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 2005); John T. Fitzgerald, ed., *Friendship, flattery, and frankness of speech: studies on friendship in the New Testament world* (Leyden, New York, and Cologne, 1996); Arnaldo Momigliano, 'Freedom of speech in antiquity', in Philip P. Wiener, ed., *Dictionary of the history of ideas: studies of selected pivotal ideas* (6 vols., New York, 1973–4), II, 252–63; and Sara Monoson, *Plato's democratic entanglements: Athenian politics and the practice of philosophy* (Princeton, 2000), chs. 2 and 6.

In the 'France' Locke depicted in his journal, frank openness and candour could hardly exist; the only possible social bonds were complicated webs of self-interest. In such a society crafty pretending and pretence were a way of life.³⁰

Locke's critique of 'France' recapitulated concerns that had long preoccupied interpreters of the problem of royal service and counsel. When this problem was approached, not from the perspective of the subject who wishes to speak out, but from the contrasting perspective of a prince, the focus was on the political danger of a prince's beings surrounded by a parasitic throng of deceptive flatterers. According to Pascal, for instance, the power relations in courts meant that 'a prince can be the laughing-stock of Europe and the only one to know nothing about it'. This followed from the fact that 'telling the truth is useful to the hearer but harmful to those who tell it'; and, of course, 'those who live with princes prefer their own interests to that of the prince they serve'.³¹ At court, self-interest seemed to teach men, not to exercise *parrhesia*, which was liable to bring them into conflict with their superiors, but to be *polite*—to be, as a manual on courtly conduct pointed out, 'mild and affable', 'very acceptable, and pleasing to all'.³²

What Huguenot subjects learnt after Pascal's days, however, was the extraordinary political danger of gentlemanly and courtly politeness. According to Bayle—whose brother Jacob, a Protestant pastor, died gruesomely in Bordeaux's prison in 1685—the court of France, 'infatuated with the Spirit of Persecution', employed 'Parasites, mercenary Scribes, bigotted Flatterers', who masked the true horror of brutal dragonnades and conversions under torture by having them implemented in the name of civility and charity. The appalling persecution of Huguenots revealed the deceptiveness of the impression created by 'the Growth of Politeness of this Age'.³³ In England, in the face of Charles II's ruthless campaign of repression against all dissent, Locke too had every reason to fear a prince

³⁰ See, e.g., Locke's journal entries for 8 Feb. 1676, 10 July 1676, 2 Dec. 1676, 5 Jan. 1677, 12 July 1677, and 21 July 1678, in *Locke's travels*, pp. 30–1, 104, 116, 119, 156, and 208.

³¹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. and trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1966), fragment 978. See Quentin Skinner, *The foundations of modern political thought* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1978), I, pp. 216–17.

³² Giovanni Della Casa, *Galateo Espagnol, or, the Spanish gallant*, trans. William Style (London, 1640), sig. A6^r, and pp. 2–3 and 39–42. Markku Peltonen, *The duel in early modern England: civility, politeness and honour* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 19 and 29.

³³ Pierre Bayle, *Ce que c'est que la France toute Catholique sous le regne de Louis le Grand* ([Amsterdam] 1686), e.g., pp. 48–52. *Commentary*, preliminary discourse, pp. 40 and 55; and II.v, p. 185.

who is 'corrupted with flattery, and armed with power'.³⁴ In exile, he joined, with his *Epistola*, the Baylean campaign against the self-righteous zeal for truth which legitimized the designs of churchmen—greedy for dominion while pretending 'only love for the truth'—to slaughter those they branded heretics.³⁵ Both Bayle and Locke saw very clearly that the civilised world of western Europeans was not really civilised at all; that the involvement of servile courtiers and ambitious churchmen in cold-blooded coercion represented a way of life, a culture, that ought not to endure.

V

At the historical juncture of 1685, Bayle and Locke asked what force it was that made Christians responsible for barbarities, and on which terms they might live with one another in peace. Their immediate responses to the brutalities of religious violence—embedded in the diverse formats of Bayle's *Ce que c'est que la France toute Catholique* and the oldest part of his *Commentaire*, of the first edition of Locke's *Essay* and his *Epistola*—were based on almost identical premises. Assumptions that were widely shared in their circles in the Dutch Republic suggested that religious controversy and persecution are induced by self-centred, ambitious, and bigoted courtiers and churchmen holding either unfounded beliefs or probable beliefs with more certainty than reason warranted.³⁶ The rational remedy was to hound any hubris out of mind, discipline self-interest (or *amour-propre*) in the interest of 'Peace... in the diversity of Opinions', and to follow what Bayle's opening chapter in the *Commentaire* called 'the Way of Reason', permitting the better argument and the weight of evidence to govern belief-formation.³⁷

³⁴ John Locke, *Two treatises of government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Student edn, Cambridge, 1988), preface; I.3 and 10; II.91, 94, 162, 210, 226, and 239.

³⁵ Locke, *Epistola*, 88–9.

³⁶ See, e.g., Philip van Limborch, *Historia Inquisitionis* (Amsterdam, 1692), I.vi, pp. 28–9; Jean Le Clerc, 'Dissertatio philosophica de argumento theologico ab invidia ducto', in *Logica*, IV.viii [originally 1692], in idem, *Opera philosophica* (2 vols., Amsterdam, 1698), I; *HOS* (July 1700), art. I, p. 308, on the French translation of Locke's *Essay*; and Jean Le Clerc, *Parrhasiana ou pensées diverses sur des matières de critique, d'histoire, de morale et de politique* (2 vols., Amsterdam, 1699 and 1701), II, pp. 431–2.

³⁷ *Essay*, IV.xv.5–6 and xvi.1–4, pp. 656–9. *Commentary*, I.i, pp. 68–75, and II.i, pp. 138–41. On the first two parts of Bayle's *Commentaire*, see Ian Harris, 'Toleration and its place: a study of Pierre Bayle in his *Commentaire philosophique*', in Sarah Hutton and Paul Schuur-

Notwithstanding all the subsequent disagreements of Bayle and Locke, there was, then, a clear controlling tendency which the *Commentaire* and the *Essay* of 1689 shared. At this stage they both argued for the importance of 'as full and exact an enquiry as' a seeker of truth can make, and castigated those who 'never questioned, never examined, their own Opinions' and who were generally the fiercest persecutors of dissenters. The practical use, in the conditions defined by religious warfare as well as by the fundamental conflict over *the* truth within Protestantism, of Bayle's and Locke's way of reason was to teach men how to conduct their lives: to teach, first of all, that they 'are unreasonable in imposing that as a Truth on other Men's Belief, which they themselves have not searched into'; and, secondly, that, having searched after truth, they will 'find so little reason to be magisterial in their Opinions, that nothing insolent and imperious is to be expected from them'.³⁸

Ideally, Bayle's and Locke's seeker of truth stood in an instrumental relation to himself and suspended assent to traditional beliefs.³⁹ He knew that a child can be educated to endorse any religious or moral doctrine, for a child's 'Soul receives all the Doctrines infus'd into it...even as a Copper-plate receives all kind of Gravings indifferently: The Canons of the Council of Trent no less readily than those of the Synod of Dort'.⁴⁰ He knew that he needed to rediscover truth for himself in order to have it. This way of reason discredited the conventional carriers of truth—the elite's judicially prescriptive interpretations of Scripture and tradition, the community of saints and the church as a mystical extension of Christ's divine person—excepting the individual *qua* seeker of truth.⁴¹

Here we encounter a central ideal derived from the 'new philosophers'—from Descartes, Mersenne, Gassendi, Hobbes, Malebranche, Arnauld and Nicole: traditional habits of mind, superstitions, and prejudices are broken down by a thorough examination, which yields a new minimalist core of rational beliefs that can be endorsed by all seekers of truth, regardless of their religious denomination. With this way of reason, Bayle and Locke were certainly trying to shake up their contemporaries' imaginative orien-

man, eds., *Studies on Locke: sources, contemporaries, and legacy: in honour of G. A. J. Rogers* (Dordrecht, 2008), 225–43; and Rex, *Essays*, esp. 161–2.

³⁸ *Essay*, IV.xvi.1–4, pp. 658–61. Cf. *Commentary*, I.5, p. 94; and II.i, pp. 138–41.

³⁹ *Commentary*, I.1, pp. 69–70; and *Essay*, IV.xx, pp. 706–19.

⁴⁰ *Commentary*, IV.xiii–xv, pp. 470–4. Cf. *Essay*, I.iii.22, p. 81; and IV.xx.9–10, pp. 712–13.

⁴¹ *Commentary*, I.1, pp. 74–5; and II.x, pp. 262–4. *Essay*, IV.xv.6 and xx.17, p. 657 and 718–19.

tation. It is important, however, to be clear that they did not aim to eliminate the weaknesses inherent in the selfish man, and transform his soul. In fact, they both cast aside the more spiritual task of a change of man's soul, which they considered merely an index of cognitive self-deception, or even deceitfulness in sinister cases. Their doctrines amounted to an annihilation of the 'beatific vision of the other life'. Human understanding was reduced to the practical and discursive faculty of reason alone; human knowledge could not extend 'beyond the limits of this life'; the human condition did not permit the 'special Union of the Soul with the Divine Essence' which, if feasible, would have led to the truth directly.⁴²

This is why in 1682 Locke reacted so angrily to Damaris Cudworth's attempt to introduce him to the intellectual model of loving the eternal truth, proffered, for example, by John Smith and Ralph Cudworth. Locke was unreceptive—and upset her. There could, in his view, be no path for the Platonic lover of truth, 'who running and shooting up above his own Logical or Self-rational life, pierceth into the Highest life': this 'Metaphysical and Contemplative man' was in fact an enthusiast, a dangerous madman who had quitted his reason like the Dervishes in Turkey who 'pretend to Revelations Extasies vision Rapture' or like the yogis amongst the Hindus who 'talke of being illuminated and intirely united to god'.⁴³ At the start of his *Commentaire* Bayle was equally convinced of the menace of enthusiasm. He agreed that 'all the Dreams of old, all the Visions of the Patriarchs... all Appearances of Angels... must have pass'd the Test of natural Light', the test of natural reason, which distinguished truth from falsehood and served as an antidote to cognitive delusion and deceit.⁴⁴

VI

In its political application, Bayle's and Locke's way of reason, with its sceptical tolerationist lessons, was in stark contrast to the rationale behind the armed resistance of which Jurieu and his allies began dreaming in

⁴² Locke, 'Of study', p. 412. *Commentary*, I.1, p. 68. Contrast with John Smith, 'Discourse I', from *Select discourses* (1660), in C. A. Patrides, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists* (London, 1969), esp. p. 140. See the extended exchange between Locke and Damaris Cudworth, later Lady Masham, about Smith's work, beginning with Cudworth to Locke, 16 Feb. [1682], *Correspondence*, II, pp. 484–5.

⁴³ Smith, 'Discourse I', p. 143; and Cudworth to Locke, 27 Feb. [1682], and Locke to Cudworth [6 Apr. 1682?], *Correspondence*, II, pp. 489–90 and 500–1. Cf. *Essay*, IV.xviii.11, p. 696.

⁴⁴ *Commentary*, I.1, pp. 68–71.

exile. As early as 1684 Jurieu exhorted persecuted Huguenots to defy Louis XIV's regime and 'to preach the truth in France' on pain of divine retribution: should they obey the king, they would disobey God. *In extremis*, they would be justified in taking up arms against the regime; and at the time Jurieu believed that movement amongst the Huguenots of Dauphiné and Vivarets towards resistance was a portent for the whole of France, which would, if persecution continued to intensify, be bathed in blood.⁴⁵ Subsequently, after William of Orange had begun preparing to strike against France, Jurieu pinned his hopes on a holy crusade, warranted by the superior right of *the truth*.⁴⁶

Although both Jurieu and Locke were to defend the English Revolution of 1688–9 and the war against Louis XIV, there is, in fact, a significant gap between Jurieu's arguments for resistance for the truth's sake and the justification of resistance which Locke presented in 1689, in the *Two treatises of government*.⁴⁷ Locke's basic theory in the 'Second treatise', probably composed in *circa* 1681–3, is not centred on the superiority of the right of truth; nor does it place 'love of truth' at the heart of collective life. What has turned out to be, in the long run, one of its strengths is that Locke took men, not as he preferred them to be, but as his absolutist adversaries portrayed them to be, each man partial and fickle in his personal judgement.⁴⁸ Another important element of his theory was that societies were no longer, and could not become, as virtuous as during 'the Golden Age' (except in, say, America, 'which is still a Pattern of the first Ages in Asia and Europe'). The virtuous harmony of interests, characteristic of the golden age, had been destabilized and succeeded by new forms of collective life which carried with them a propensity to set men's principal interests against one another. There had emerged a new constant, conflict of interest, and a competitive monetary economy, which had, as its moral and psychological groundwork, 'vain Ambition, and *amor sceleratus habendi* [the accursed love of possessing], evil Concupiscence'—forces that 'had corrupted Mens minds'.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Pierre Jurieu, *L'esprit de Mr. Arnaud* (2 parts, Deventer, 1684), II, 365–71.

⁴⁶ E.g., Pierre Jurieu, *Examen d'un libelle contre la religion, contre l'état, et contre la Révolution d'Angleterre* (The Hague, 1691), 239. Rex, *Essays*, 213–25.

⁴⁷ S.-J. Savonius, 'Locke in French: the *Du gouvernement civil* of 1691 and its readers', *Historical Journal*, 47 (2004), 47–79.

⁴⁸ James Tully, *An approach to political philosophy: Locke in contexts* (Cambridge, 1993), 44–5.

⁴⁹ Locke, *Two treatises*, II.46, 107–8, III, and 184.

Locke's *Two treatises*, first drafted during the Exclusion Crisis and its aftermath, was not an invitation to his contemporaries to restore the virtuousness and simple life of the lost golden age. Instead, it was an exhortation to pass through the absolutist age of corruption to a time when collective life would once again exhibit a relative integrity and moral health. Its theory was no panacea for the riddles of modern politics—human untrustworthiness, structural opposition of interest, and the persistent possibility of misgovernment. Only after his flight to the Dutch Republic in 1683, and especially after the successful consolidation of William III's hold on power in England, did the weight of Locke's hopes and intellectual energies begin to shift gradually in the more ambitious direction of solving the fundamental problems of collective life, once and for all.

This new direction, articulated in the domain of problems of human understanding, conditioned the revisions to the *Essay* in the 1690s as well as the 'Conduct', which Locke began composing in 1697. Without abandoning the 'way of reason' entirely, he shifted the emphasis away from the force of argument and reason—from the tenet that everyone can, or at least ought to, govern belief-formation by the weight of the evidence which a fair examination yields⁵⁰—and instead placed the indispensability of 'love of truth' at the forefront.⁵¹ For the mind to 'proceed rationally', 'not entertaining any Proposition with greater assurance than the Proofs it is built upon will warrant', 'Love of Truth [is] necessary', Locke declared in the fourth edition of the *Essay* in 1699. His new emphasis was on the judgement that action is guided and the adoption of beliefs determined, not by rational factors, but by men's passions and interests.⁵²

In the nature of the case, these non-rational determinants of assent and action are massively contingent: predicated on the fluctuations of human desire and subjective taste, of ever-changing customs and fashions. But that does not, according to Locke, make them less powerful. The most powerful governor of conduct is 'the Law of Opinion or Reputation': there is a deep tendency in men to care about how others see them and 'to govern themselves chiefly, if not solely, by this Law of Fashion'.⁵³

In theory, it was fashionable to be a lover of truth, at least in Locke's 'Commonwealth of Learning'. In practice, however, the case was precisely the

⁵⁰ *Essay*, IV.xv, pp. 654–7 and xx.15, pp. 716–17.

⁵¹ Tully, *An approach*, 179–241, esp. 199–201.

⁵² *Essay*, IV.xv.5 and xix.1, pp. 656 and 697–8 (4th edn).

⁵³ *Essay*, II.xxviii.10–12, pp. 353–7 (2nd edn).

opposite. *Amor sceleratus habendi* and 'love of Dominion'⁵⁴ had emerged as the most effective *de facto* governors of assent and action in Europe, with murderous consequences in Bourbon France and Stuart England. On Locke's alarmist view, expressed in a letter of 1701, Europeans needed to learn quickly that they must change their existing ways of behaviour: 'Without a stop to the overflowing of vice, and a reformation into better manners tis easy to see the several communities in this part of the world [Europe] will very hardly be able to subsist. for vertue is the very strength and cement of Societie without which it cannot stand.'⁵⁵

The solution Locke proposed can be stated quite simply: it was to make love of truth the predominant disposition, acquired through training; make it the counter-passion to *amor sceleratus habendi* and love of dominion by habituating the elite's sons (and, less urgently, daughters) into thinking and acting in specific ways. The question of how to educate lovers of truth—explored in the revised editions of *Some thoughts concerning education* (1695 and 1699) and in the 'Conduct' (published posthumously in 1706)—moved to centre-stage in Locke's enterprise. When the development of his thought is viewed through the prism of the successive versions of the *Essay*, his adjustment of the theory of the determinants of belief-formation and action may seem slight, and yet its implications were dramatic.

VII

Why, then, did Locke's thought take a new turn sometime after 1685? Why did Locke abandon the view that, after the loss of the golden age, *amor sceleratus habendi* has become an inescapable feature of life in Europe? Exactly what motivated this drastic shift in intellectual judgement is unclear, and it is likely to remain so, at least in the absence of additional manuscript evidence coming to light. Yet there are several helpful approaches to the understanding of his new orientation. It is important, for example, to recapture the optimism in his circle of friends after the Revolution of 1688–9. Philip van Limborch, professor of divinity at the

⁵⁴ John Locke, *Some thoughts concerning education*, eds. John W. and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford, 1989), §136, p. 195; and §105, p. 164: the desire to have one's will and the 'love of Dominion' are the 'two Roots of almost all the Injustice and Contention, that so disturb humane Life'.

⁵⁵ Locke to Furly, 30 May 1701, *Correspondence*, VII, p. 337.

Remonstrant College in Amsterdam, wrote to Locke that his son 'shed tears of joy as soon as he heard that the sceptre was offered to' William and Mary.⁵⁶ William III was their prince, 'our Great Restorer',⁵⁷ and after a sombre decade marked by persecution, they expected western Europe's future to be open to decisive improvements upon its past.⁵⁸

What I wish to underline here, however, is the importance of Locke's becoming associated, during his exile in 1683–9, with a particular network of Arminians and 'Pajonist' Calvinists. (Whilst the doctrines developed by the followers of Jacob Arminius and of Claude Pajon were separate, they could be conflated by such adversaries as the young Bayle in the late 1670s,⁵⁹ for they both placed a heavy emphasis, highlighted below, on the exertion of man's natural powers and faculties in the process of conversion.) The key to the answer lies, I wish to suggest, in Locke's having begun to assimilate modes of thought that were dominant among his new Continental friends, protagonists of a specific 'heterodox' understanding of the genuine Christian's path. The main qualification this path demanded was moral: it was the predisposition, or the vocation, to love truth, which was put before doctrine and ritual, and which correlated with a cult of heroic *parrhesia*.⁶⁰

In the Dutch Republic in the late 1680s, Locke's new Francophone associates were significantly outside of the *Refuge*'s establishment because of their 'heterodoxy' and outspokenness. But it had in fact been earlier, when challenging the Dordrecht Canons in Geneva and France, that they had first adopted the identity of a *parrhesiastes*, a fearless truth-teller. One of them was Charles Le Cène, a Pajonist whose ministry ceased at Charenton, Paris, before the Revocation of 1685 on account of his alleged 'Pelagianism'. He composed a new French translation of the Bible: its motto stressed that one must have the courage to speak the truth in order to

⁵⁶ Van Limborch to Locke, [c. 12/22 Apr. and] 26 Apr./6 May 1689, *Correspondence*, III, p. 611 (trans. De Beer).

⁵⁷ Locke, *Two treatises*, preface.

⁵⁸ Savonius, 'Locke in French'.

⁵⁹ Bayle to Jacob Bayle, 12 Jan. 1678, in Laurence Bergon, Hubert Bost, Edward James, Elisabeth Labrousse, Antony McKenna, Wiep van Bunge, *et al.*, eds., *Correspondance de Pierre Bayle* (6 vols. to date, Oxford, 1999–2008), III, p. 1. Rex, *Essays*, 143–4.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Philip van Limborch, 'Praefatio ad Lectorem', in Etienne de Courcelles [Stephanus Curcellaeus], *Opera theologica*, ed. Philip van Limborch (Amsterdam, 1675), sig. *3; and Le Clerc to Van Limborch, 10 Aug. 1681, in Grazia and Sina, eds., *Epistolario*, I, p. 14. Cf. Locke to Van Limborch, 4 and 18 Oct. 1698, *Correspondence*, VI, 495–6.

liberate those in error.⁶¹ Another self-styled *parrhesiastes* was Le Clerc: his first book, published in 1681, began with a letter to 'Firminius Parrhasius'. Much later, Le Clerc drew on the examples of *parrhesia* in the New Testament to support his claim that Christ did not accept Nicodemite disciples who believed privately 'as if they were ashamed of His doctrine, or valued men's beneficence, threats, and punishments more than His precepts': Christ's disciples were to 'be Christians openly and before all'.⁶²

Pajonists and Arminians were centrally concerned with the issue of 'conversion'—or, in terms of Calvinist theology, 'justification' and 'regeneration'—and their primary thesis was that God converts men through their own *natural* efforts to achieve a rational understanding of truth and surmount the obstacles to loving the truth. This contradicted the view, endorsed by Augustinians on both sides of the great confessional divide, that conversion follows the immediate, *supernatural*, and mysterious action of the Holy Spirit, or internal grace, which no sinner can earn.⁶³ Whilst Pascal, for example, had insisted that 'love of truth' is 'the greatest of Christian virtues', he had been no less insistent that after Adam's Fall self-love and a matching hatred for truth had become insurmountable obstacles in the absence of grace: in the post-lapsarian condition, 'we hate the truth and it is kept from us; we desire to be flattered and we are flattered'. Unless divine grace transforms the human will, man wants to deceive and be deceived.⁶⁴

For the 'semi-Pelagian' Protestants who became Locke's allies, operations of grace were far less mysterious, the sinner's own efforts much more powerful. In theory, every believer could overcome the forces of *amor sce-leratus habendi* and love of dominion. Special emphasis was laid, not on

⁶¹ Charles Le Cène, *Projet d'une nouvelle version françoise de la Bible*, ed. Michel-Charles Le Cène (2 vols., Amsterdam, 1741), 1, p. 1 (3rd pagination).

⁶² Jean Le Clerc, *Epistolæ theologicæ* ('Irenopoli' [Saumur], '1679' [1681]); and 'De eligenda, inter dissidentes Christianos, sententia. Liber unus', in Hugo Grotius, *De veritate religionis Christianæ*, ed. Jean Le Clerc (Amsterdam, 1709), 305–43, at 306–7.

⁶³ On Jurieu's deliberately anti-Pajonist emphasis on the workings of the internal grace at the expense of human understanding, see his *Traité de la nature et de la grace* (Amsterdam, 1715 [originally 1687]), esp. 230–2. On the controversy between Pajonists and 'Augustinian' Calvinists, and on its earlier phase, see B. G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut heresy: Protestant scholasticism and humanism in seventeenth-century France* (Madison, 1969); Rex, *Essays*, 88–97, 142, and 204–6; and Frans Pieter van Stam, *The controversy over the theology of Saumur: disrupting debates among the Huguenots in complicated circumstances, 1635–1650* (Amsterdam and Maarssen, 1988).

⁶⁴ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragments 978–9.

purifying man's soul, as described by the Platonic 'enthusiasts',⁶⁵ but on the external circumstances which prepare men, hypothetically *all* mankind, to comprehend God's truth and cultivate love of truth: education of children, in particular. Education readied a child to love the truth and become his animal self's worst enemy; it aimed at planting the disposition which permits a victory over *amor sceleratus habendi*.⁶⁶

Whilst in France in the late 1670s Locke had come powerfully under the influence of Nicole's Augustinian *Essais de morale* (and so had Bayle, of course), which called into question the possibility of ever succeeding in attempts to reform and enlighten others. Central to Nicole's case for quietist social pacification and the individual's attainment of inner peace (and, later, to the comparable case of Bayle, discussed in the next section) was an insistence on the fallen man's inability to acquire true knowledge through his own efforts and 'the inability of his will, to follow his reason'. As Locke's translation of Nicole's essays put it, prudence 'requires us to . . . quit the thoughts of correcting others. The right way is, to endeavour to secure our peace by reforming our selves', abandoning the presumptuous claims of rational, 'external' reformation.⁶⁷ By the 1690s, however, Locke had come to believe that attempts to reform others are less hazardous than a Nicolean refusal to run the risk, and his conception of the nature of man had come to be in broad agreement with Arminian thinking. It now seemed to him that human beings were as it were suspended between their animal self and their real spiritual self: in the Pauline terms of his final work on the Epistles, the flesh and the spirit are the 'two principles in every man which draw him different ways'. Man may descend to lead the life of 'animal man', or rise to lead the life of 'spiritual man', who

⁶⁵ See Smith, 'Discourse I'; and Henry More, 'The purification of a Christian man's soul' (Discourse XIII from *Discourses on several texts of Scripture* (1692)), in Patrides, ed., *The Cambridge Platonists*, pp. 200–12.

⁶⁶ A thorough exposition of these matters by a friend of Locke and Le Clerc will be found in Le Cène's manuscripts: The Huguenot Library, London, MSS R 5, 10 vols.: Charles Le Cène's papers. For a list of contents, see Eric R. Briggs, 'Les manuscrits de Charles Le Cène (1647?–1703) dans la bibliothèque de la "Huguenot Society of London"', *Tijdschrift voor de studie van de Verlichting*, 5 (1977), 358–78.

⁶⁷ Pierre Nicole, 'Discourse of the Weakness of Man' and 'Treatise concerning the way of preserving peace with men', trans. John Locke, in Jean S. Yolton, ed., *John Locke as translator: three of the *Essais* of Pierre Nicole in French and English* (Oxford, 2000), II.48, III.i.6, and III.ii.4–5. See Ian Harris, *The mind of John Locke: a study of political theory in its intellectual setting* (Cambridge, 1994), 282–4. On Bayle's reading of Nicole and his Epicurean Augustinianism, see, e.g., Bayle to Jacob Bayle, 5 June 1678, in Bergon, Labrousse, et al., eds., *Correspondance*, III, p. 39; and John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680–1760* (Cambridge, 2005), 130 and 216–25.

can, because aided by divine revelation, adhere to 'what is righteous, just and good'.⁶⁸

The real challenge—to the prospects for individual enlightenment and, hence, ultimately for a civilisation of enlightened individuals—was to transcend the natural impulses of the flesh and transfer one's love from the animal self to the truth. Individuals were to aspire after a state of enlightenment where the absolute—that is, truth, God—dictated to their subjective wills how to act, regardless of their own assessments of what might suit their 'different palates and stomachs', contributing to their happiness in the here and now.⁶⁹ Enlightenment for Locke in no sense implied the process of strengthening 'our private perswasion *within our selves*'; rather, lovers of truth shaped their beliefs to match the external reality of 'the written Word of God *without us*, or that Standard of Reason which is common to us with all Men'.⁷⁰ The special tool for shaping beliefs was the logic of ideas developed in Locke's *Essay* and Le Clerc's *Logica* (1692); and the tools to be abandoned were those of rhetorical training, which 'least suits . . . a lover of Truth'.⁷¹ As Locke put it in a stunning passage he added to the fourth edition of his *Essay*, rhetorical education was likely 'to turn young Men's Minds from the sincere Search and Love of Truth . . . and to make them doubt whether there is any such thing'. That young Europeans, one generation after another, were contaminated by their rhetorical training could scarcely be believed by 'the rational part of Mankind not corrupted by Education'.⁷²

This vision of enlightenment was developed with the fullest assurance by Le Clerc in his *Parrhasiana* of 1699–1701. It is significant that he attempted to define lovers of truth in opposition to men of 'false zeal'. For instance, the zealous Calvinists' actions against Arminians constituted *persecution*, and the appropriate response to their false zeal was the 'true

⁶⁸ John Locke, *A paraphrase and notes on the Epistles of St Paul to the Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians*, ed. Arthur W. Wainwright (2 vols., Oxford, 1987), I, p. 153, note on Gal; and p. 177, note on 1 Cor. John Dunn, '“Bright Enough for All Our Purposes”: John Locke's conception of a civilized society', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 43 (1989), 133–53, at 140–1.

⁶⁹ See Locke to William Molyneux, 10 Jan. 1698, *Correspondence*, VI, pp. 294–5.

⁷⁰ See *Essay*, IV.xix.16, p. 706 (4th edition; emphases added).

⁷¹ Locke, *Education*, §§188–9, pp. 240–3 (3rd edn).

⁷² *Essay*, IV.vii.11, p. 601 (4th edn). See also Locke, 'Conduct', §67, pp. 217–18; and *Education*, §171, p. 229. On Locke's critique of the contemporary curriculum, and on his attempt to translate his educational ideals into reality, see Savonius, 'The role of Huguenot tutors' and 'The educational revolution of John Locke and his Huguenot allies', in Viviane Prest and Geraldine Sheridan, eds., *Les Huguenots éducateurs dans l'espace européen à l'époque moderne* (Paris, 2011), 155–86.

zeal' of Phinehas, who, in the fourth book of the Pentateuch, rose, took a javelin, and ran Zimri and his companion through. God rewarded Phinehas' true zeal with a covenant of peace and priesthood.⁷³ The outlook conveyed by this stark Scriptural example, in combination with the Arminian leaning towards the view that if a man sinned and was damned it was his own fault, gave Le Clerc and Locke a certain lack of sensibility in relation to those they deemed enemies of truth, who were 'not to be dealt with' 'in the way of reason'.⁷⁴

VIII

At first glance, Le Clerc and Locke's attempt to place love of truth at the heart of collective life appears entirely fanciful: its worst fault seems to be an alarming naïveté about the practical realities of politics. As it happens, in the 1690s Bayle and Beauval did dismiss it as a wild fantasy. For instance, when Beauval reviewed the *Parrhasiana* in his journal, he discredited Le Clerc's 'sterile love of truth' as a utopian ideal.⁷⁵ Earlier Beauval had levelled the charge of utopianism against the French translation of Locke's 'Second treatise'.⁷⁶ In the great *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, first published in 1697, Bayle explained that since after Adam's Fall human reason had lost its power to enforce its dictates, man's base passions would quickly ruin the utopian attempts to build the beautiful states envisaged by Plato, More, Campanella.⁷⁷

The charge of utopianism was fairly straightforward: in essence, it was that the sterile love of absolute truth and the associated heroism of self-effacement may beguile men with their moral beauty into undertaking lines of political action which have dangerous consequences and are ultimately misguided. The verdict of Baylean thought was that the supposed division between the 'false zeal' for truth and the 'true zeal' is epistemically confused and implausible (that nothing separates Jurieu's from Le Clerc's love of truth), and that the entire Lockean enterprise is therefore

⁷³ Le Clerc, *Parrhasiana*, II, 405–21; (on Phinehas, see Num. 25:7–14).

⁷⁴ Locke to Collins, 21 Feb. 1704, *Correspondence*, VIII, 206.

⁷⁵ *HOS* (May 1699), art. V, pp. 191–208, at p. 201; and (Jan. 1701), art. III, pp. 27–36, at pp. 27–8.

⁷⁶ *HOS* (June–Aug. 1691), art. III, pp. 457–65; Savonius, 'Locke in French'.

⁷⁷ Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique* ('2nd edn', 3 vols., Rotterdam, 1722), I, 'Charron, Pierre'; and II, 'Hobbes (Thomas)', remark D. Wootton, 'Pierre Bayle, libertine?', in Stewart, ed., *Studies in seventeenth-century European philosophy*, 197–226, esp. p. 200.

of little assistance in averting the horrors of religious violence. Indeed, it appeared to compromise the aim of pacifying Europe because of its war-like spirit, which Locke himself summed up in 1701 by stating that war would be preferable to peace because 'how fond soever I am of peace I think truth ought to accompany it'.⁷⁸ It is evident that Locke did not wish to join forces with Jurieu; but it is equally evident that in the 1690s Bayle and Beauval equated his politics with Jurieu's.

Earlier, in the *Commentaire* of 1686–8, Bayle had attempted to sweep away the foundations of deceptively beautiful states in two contrasting ways. In its oldest parts, in particular, he advanced the tolerationist way of reason, which his text shared with Locke's initial version of the *Essay* and which echoed arguments widely shared by a variety of new philosophers. The way of reason, especially when seen from the vantage-point of today's Enlightenment studies, seems characterized by vigilance against custom and prejudice: by the disposition to give free rein to 'fair examination' and, in terms of Gadamer's hermeneutics, to be prejudiced against prejudice itself, denying custom its power.⁷⁹

However, Bayle's argument began moving in another direction with his discussion of man's 'inward light' and 'interior truth'. This movement culminated in the famous thesis of the rights of erroneous conscience, particularly prominent in the final part of the *Commentaire* (1688), published in reply to Jurieu's attack on the earlier parts and case for the claims of absolute truth.⁸⁰ Bayle's thesis rested on the assertions that 'it belongs to God alone to punish him who is in an Error', and that God will not punish 'an involuntary bad Choice' made by a lover of truth. Human belief was not a voluntary, discretionary affair: lovers of truth could not simply choose their beliefs or alter them at will; they had to follow the dictates of conscience, whatever they commanded, because the human soul 'is incapable of discerning when its Persuasions are false, and when true', and must trust its persuasions 'upon an inward feeling, that they appear to her true'.⁸¹ With such assertions, an unstoppable power arose in Bayle's thought, the power of interior apparent truth, annihilating all

⁷⁸ Locke to Peter King, 23 June 1701, *Correspondence*, VII, 350. Cf. Rex, *Essays*, 183, on Beauval's *Tolérance des religions* (1684).

⁷⁹ *Commentary*, I.1, pp. 69–70. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method*, trans. Donald D. Marshall and Joel Weinsheimer (Revised 2nd edn, London, 1989), 270–1 on Christian Thomasius's aversion to 'prejudice'.

⁸⁰ Rex, *Essays*, 173–87. Contrast with John Kilcullen, *Sincerity and truth: essays on Arnauld, Bayle, and toleration* (Oxford, 1988), 61–105, esp. p. 101.

⁸¹ *Commentary*, I.5, p. 100; II.vi, pp. 206–8; II.x, pp. 259–60; and IV.xiii, p. 466.

external criteria transcending the individual's subjectivity and disposition. The voice within was god to the individual—not the voice of *amor sceleratus habendi*, of course, but that of conscience, the sole 'Touch-stone of Truth'.⁸²

The normative voice of truth was not 'absolute' and the same for everyone; instead, it was an individual voice of conscience, discovered through self-reflection. There is acute tension in Bayle's *Commentaire* between this search for self-knowledge and the way of reason whereby seekers of bare truth abstract, and free themselves, 'from all private Interest, and from the Customs of their Country' in order to impose a new rational norm for their identity.⁸³ Bayle's opposition to the way of reason—which he advocated, as noted above, at the critical moment of 1685—reached its apotheosis in the *Dictionnaire* where he identified the effort to 'rise up against errors protected by custom and the habits of peoples' as the root cause of 'the most fearsome intolerance'. In the *Dictionnaire*, his remedies for the problem of intolerance were essentially 'negative'; they were ways of defusing destructive ideologies which encouraged men to attempt the task of moral-spiritual reconstruction and thus to impose the 'truth' on those who had yet to correct their habits and behaviour.⁸⁴ It was a delusion to imagine that man can transcend his animal self, and then master and discipline others; freedom would not come unless such illusions were expunged from the human imagination.

Among the early-modern works which had articulated the importance of 'negative therapy', the most arresting and influential was Montaigne's *Essais*, which discarded any attempt at an impersonal, 'rational' perspective on oneself. The answer Montaigne gave to the question of how he should seek to shape and plan his life can be best outlined as a rejection: 'Unlike Socrates I have not corrected my natural complexions by education and the power of reason . . . I combat nothing; my two principal parts live graciously together in peace and harmony'.⁸⁵ The gist of Montaigne's answer was that he should accept (indeed embrace) the contingencies of birth and custom, and accommodate himself to the diversity of other people's 'complexions'. A century later, a blatantly antithetical answer issued

⁸² *Commentary*, II.ix, p. 240; II.x, pp. 261–2; and IV.xiv, pp. 472–3.

⁸³ *Commentary*, I.1, p. 69.

⁸⁴ Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, e.g., 'Mâcon', remark C, and 'Saintes', remark F, in *Political writings*, 176–8 and 237–8.

⁸⁵ Michel de Montaigne, *The complete essays*, ed. and trans. M. A. Screech (Revised edn, London, 2003), III.12, p. 1201 (4th edition of 1588).

from Locke, who praised Socrates' correcting wrong opinions: in the midst of Athenians, there stood one almost superhuman defender of truth, 'one Socrates amongst them, that opposed and laughed at their Polytheism, and wrong Opinions of the Deity'.⁸⁶

The contradiction between these emancipatory foci, the 'Socratic' and the 'anti-Socratic', became even sharper when Pascal, reading Augustine through Montaigne, set out to escape from the 'evil of deliberate self-delusion'. In order to liberate ourselves from 'tyranny', 'the desire to dominate everything', the mistake of 'wanting to rule everywhere', we ought, Pascal suggested, to turn inwards, 'to reveal our innermost heart and show ourselves for what we are'. In the Augustinian tradition of thought that Bayle inherited, enlightenment came with disillusionment.⁸⁷ The distinctive transposition he effected in this tradition was to suppress Pascal's two counterpoises, namely the supra-rational intellective faculty of the heart, through which the spiritual self could escape from the wretchedness of the animal self, and the Church as the carrier of truth.⁸⁸ Once the heart and the church (in fact all formal religion) had lost their roles as conduits of truth—because they too were liable to turn into instruments of tyranny—there only remained what Bayle called 'the Foundation of Mount Sinai, which can never be shaken': 'Conscience, and a Zeal for the Truth'.⁸⁹

In the life of Bayle's lover of apparent truth, the single most important feature is the ability to follow the dictates of conscience, whether absolutely true or profoundly erroneous. It is crucial to notice that the *Commentaire* is not only an apology for believers who hold fast to their own notion of worship in the face of persecution. It is also a denunciation of the emancipatory perspectives in which love of truth was usually understood. Startlingly, the involuntariness and naturalness of Bayle's love of apparent truth introduces what may be labelled a form of mental slavery, a condition in which human beings are dominated and captured by their subjective perceptions of truth, and in which there is little incentive for them to verify the correctness of their beliefs.⁹⁰ Why, for instance, would

⁸⁶ John Locke, *The reasonableness of Christianity: as delivered in the Scriptures*, ed. John C. Higgins-Biddle (Oxford, 1999), 144.

⁸⁷ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragments 58, 114, 119–22, 143, and 978.

⁸⁸ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragments 110 and 974.

⁸⁹ *Commentary*, II.ix, p. 243.

⁹⁰ See *Commentary*, II.i, p. 146–7; and Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, 'Synergists', remark C, in *Political writings*, p. 278.

a man whose conscience tells him to kill his neighbour re-examine his motives and refrain from committing murder? Why would a zealot, 'who thinks himself oblig'd in Conscience to persecute', refrain from using constraint in matters of religion?⁹¹ Furthermore, although Bayle developed his doctrine of love of truth in explicitly religious terms,⁹² it is clear that atheism could possess the mind of a lover of apparent truth in as compelling a way as devotion to God. The search after truth could, when the non-essentialist ethics of belief placed all the emphasis on one's intention and disposition, deprive one of belief. For example,

Mahomet Efendi, who was executed in Constantinople for having dogmatized against God's existence...preferred to persist in his blasphemies, declaring that, *Although he had no reward to expect, love of truth compelled him to suffer martyrdom for its sake.*⁹³

Bayle's *Commentaire* does not furnish overpowering moral grounds for the murderer, persecutor, and atheist who listen to the promptings of conscience with a zeal for apparent truth, to behave otherwise. The force which checks their actions is, not 'education and the power of reason', but the menace of the state's coercive power.⁹⁴ Bayle's system needs holders of absolute state power who remain impartial when judging the demands of the public good: if Locke's enlightened society stands or falls by the education of lovers of truth, Bayle's demands near incorruptibility from its rulers. Was Locke's hope of an enlightened civilisation more utopian than Bayle's fond hope that rulers 'employ an aide to recite each morning: *persecute no one for his opinions in religion and do not use the right of the sword against conscience*'?⁹⁵

Subsequently, the new generation of thinkers in the *Refuge*, headed by Jean Barbeyrac, made more or less desperate efforts to reconcile Locke's approach to the realisation of an enlightened civilisation with Bayle's, trying to combine the education of an elite that can place restraints on the sovereign with the inviolable authority of individual conscience.⁹⁶ But,

⁹¹ *Commentary*, II.ix, pp. 242–9; and IV.xvi, pp. 481–2.

⁹² *Commentary*, II.ix, pp. 242–3.

⁹³ Bayle, *Pensées diverses*, II, §182, pp. 137–8 (quoting Paul Rycaut's *Histoire de l'état présent de l'Empire Ottoman* (1670)). Cf. *Commentary*, I.5, p. 100.

⁹⁴ *Commentary*, preliminary discourse, p. 57; II.v, pp. 189–91; and II.ix, pp. 239–49.

⁹⁵ Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, 'Mâcon', remark C, in *Political writings*, 176–7.

⁹⁶ T. J. Hochstrasser, 'The claims of conscience: natural law theory, obligation, and resistance in the Huguenot diaspora', in John Christian Laursen, ed., *New essays on the political thought of the Huguenots of the Refuge* (Leyden, New York, and Cologne, 1995), 15–51.

as I have tried to indicate, the contradictions between their enterprises were stark and ineradicable. Locke, feeling the force of the 'heterodox' Pajonist-Arminian conception of how God wants His servants to shape their lives, devoted his intellectual energies to bringing about a radical change in human character and behaviour, aspiring to a European civilisation constructed upon the ideal of *amor veritatis*. Bayle, convinced of the practical futility and danger of such aspirations, laid the intellectual groundwork for a dominant strand of the later movement of Enlightenment—the strand of David Hume and Adam Smith, of Antonio Genovesi and Ferdinando Galiani—that sought to justify a European civilisation founded on *amor sceleratus habendi* and capable of evading the claims of the absolute truth in public life.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ John Dunn, 'From applied theology to social analysis: the break between John Locke and the Scottish Enlightenment', in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and virtue: the shaping of political economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983), 119–35; and Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*.

SPINOZA AND THE RELIGIOUS RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT

Jonathan Israel

The Radical Enlightenment, being characterized above all by its unrelenting insistence on philosophical reason as the sole and exclusive guide in human life, was predominantly a secular, anti-religious and atheistic as well as democratic tendency. But it was by no means wholly devoid of support from within the religious camp. Dutch and Anglo-American Unitarianism in particular showed a certain proclivity to align with Spinozist and materialist as well as democratic positions. This paper seeks to sketch elements of what can be seen as an enduring alliance between mainstream Radical Enlightenment and at least some sections of the Socinian tradition.

As several scholars have emphasized,¹ Spinoza's close friends, associates and allies can usefully be divided into two distinct groups. On the one hand there were the secular libertines and radical Cartesians, such as Franciscus van den Enden, Lodewijk Meyer and Adriaen Koerbagh, men who never seriously invoked divine Providence, Revelation, or the light of divine inspiration. This group employed no genuinely theological categories in their arguments and sometimes spoke slightly, as Meyer and Koerbagh do in a number of passages, of even the most radical religious fringe, Socinianism.² Their writings entailed a more or less complete break with religion, discarding all allegiance to religious values. No less intimate friends of Spinoza, on the other hand, were Pieter Balling (d. 1669) who translated much of his earlier work into Dutch, Jarig Jelles (c. 1620–83), a particularly long-standing friend of more than twenty years, who composed the Preface to the *Opera Posthuma*, in 1677, and Jan Rieuwertsz (c. 1616–87), the Amsterdam publisher who published and distributed all his books, including those needing to be sold illegally and clandestinely,

¹ Most forcefully and interestingly, Wiep van Bunge who has developed this point in his *Johannes Bredenburg (1643–1691), Een Rotterdamse Collegiant* (Rotterdam, 1990), and in his 'Rationaliteit en Verlichting', *De Achttiende Eeuw*, xxxii, (2000), 145–64.

² Lodewijk Meyer, *Philosophy as the Interpreter of Holy Scripture* (1666) trans. S. Shirley (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2005), 206–10; M. Wielema, 'Adriaan Koerbagh. Biblical Criticism and Enlightenment', in Wiep van Bunge (ed.) *The Early Enlightenment in The Dutch Republic 1650–1750* (Leiden, 2003) 61–80, here 68–9.

that is everything he published after 1663. These too were known to be close students of Spinoza's writings, sympathetic to and immersed in his philosophical system, while at the same time remaining sincere Christians of a particular stamp.³ These friends were all 'Collegiants', that is, they belonged to the influential group of deeply pious and sincere, often anti-Trinitarian believers, who had established themselves since the second quarter of the seventeenth century in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and in the village of Rijnsburg, near Leiden.

All Collegiants were highly heterodox by definition, rejected all forms of organized priesthood or clergy, and entirely repudiated the principle of ecclesiastical authority and church discipline. But they also divided among themselves into several different theological streams. Only some, perhaps a minority, were principled anti-Trinitarians who systematically combined anti-Trinitarianism with a general willingness to abandon Biblical literalism. While all Socinians identified the light of reason as Man's chief guide in matters of faith and Biblical interpretation, probably only a small minority, much as with the English Unitarians in the late eighteenth century, took this rule to the point of insisting on a close symbiosis of theology and philosophy, and merging the light of reason in Bible scholarship with the rational explanation of nature's laws, with the philosophical-scientific reason of Descartes and Spinoza.⁴

Other fervently committed Collegiants who knew Spinoza personally, such as Pieter Serrarius (1600–69), a Spiritualist fringe theologian who, as we see from Spinoza's correspondence, remained in regular contact with him for some years,⁵ did adhere to the doctrine of the Trinity and other 'mysteries'. They therefore continued to believe in the divinity of Christ and the miraculous nature of man's salvation through Christ, showing no inclination to embrace Spinozism as a creed that could be fused or combined with their particular version of Christianity. Hence, it was only one strand of the Collegiants that can be characterized as firmly anti-Trinitarian

³ See van Bunge, *Johannes Bredenburg*, 187–8; A. C. Fix, *Prophecy and Reason. The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1991), 241; Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001), 164n, 170–1n, 342–58; J. Sadler, 'The Collegiants' in L. Hunt, M. Jacob and W. Mijnhardt (eds.) *Bernard Picart and the First Global Vision of Religion* (Los Angeles, 2010), 59–74, here 59.

⁴ P. G. Bietenholz, *Daniel Zwicker (1612–1678). Peace, Tolerance and God the One and Only* (Florence, 1997), 272–7; Sadler, 'Collegiants', 66–7.

⁵ On Serrarius' relationship with Spinoza, see E. G. E. van der Wall, *De mystieke chiliast Petrus Serrarius (1600–1669) en zijn wereld* (Leiden, 1987 and Ernestine van der Wall, 'Petrus Serrarius and Menasseh ben Israel', in Yosef Kaplan, H. Mechoulam and Richard H. Popkin (eds.) *Menasseh ben Israel and his World* (Leiden, 1989) 164–91, here 172–3.

Socinians of strongly philosophical bent. This group sought to merge the reason which, they claimed, grounds Christian belief with philosophical reason rather than with the direct supernatural inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Even so, as in Balling's case, and later that of Johannes Bredenburg (1643–91), the Rotterdam Collegiant whose philosophical stance proved such a divisive influence among all the Collegiant congregations in the 1680s and after, there still lingered, as Bayle noted, an element of ambiguity in their approach, a tendency to embrace the doctrine of double-truth, and a passionate resolve to square reason with faith, which long continued to mark their position off from that of the secular Spinozists.⁶

The outlook and ideas of this Collegiant current within Socinianism remained, in an important sense, quite distinct from those of a Koerbagh or a Meyer, and still more so from the atheistic materialists of eighteenth-century France. But the philosophical Collegiants were also quite unlike the anti-Trinitarian Biblical fundamentalists among the Collegiants, men such as Frans Kuyper (Franciscus Cuperus) (1629–91) who in the 1680s began to denounce the philosophical Collegiants as a self-destructive, atheistic Spinozistic betrayal from within.⁷ This distinction between philosophical and anti-philosophical Socinians is essentially different from that identified recently by Martin Mulsow as applying from the 1680s between 'new' and 'old' Socinians but, nevertheless, has some connection with it, since the philosophical Collegiants encompassed one strand of the 'new' Socinians, characterized by Mulsow as a pluralistic 'Transferprodukt'.⁸ Between the philosophical Collegiants and the Spinozists was an area of compatibility sufficiently extensive to ground what proved to be something like a long-term intellectual and tactical association with far-reaching historical implications. The philosophical Collegiants thus entered into a close alliance with Spinoza and came to regard Spinozism as a creed as much as a philosophy and one which should properly be construed, as Jelles does in his 'Vooreeden' [preface] or 'Praefatio' to the *Opera Posthuma*, as

⁶ Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697), 4 vols., (Amsterdam-Leiden-The Hague-Utrecht, 1740), IV, art. 'Spinoza', 259.

⁷ On Kuyper, and the anti-philosophical older Socinian model, see W. J. Kühler, *Het socinianisme in Nederland* (1912; repr. Leeuwarden, 1980), 243, 246–8; Van Bunge, *Johannes Bredenburg*, 90–8; also Lee C. Rice, 'Introduction and Notes' to Lodewijk Meyer, *Philosophy as the Interpreter of Holy Scripture* (Milwaukee, 2005), 16, 277.

⁸ Martin Mulsow, 'The "New Socinians": Intertextuality and Cultural Exchange in Late Socinianism', in M. Musow and Jan Rohls (eds.) *Socinianism and Arminianism. Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Leiden, 2005), 49–78, here 49–52.

a 'Christian philosophy' fully in accord with Scripture and the true foundations of the Christian religion. The contrary impression was common, according to Jelles, only because most 'Christians' follow the letter rather than the spirit of Scripture.⁹

But what was 'Spinozism' when defined as a semi-Socinian creed, a set of beliefs distinct, and to a degree detachable from, Spinoza's philosophy? Many recent scholars, some criticizing my own work, argue that there was no such thing as Dutch 'Spinozism' in the late seventeenth century.¹⁰ According to these scholars, the frequent denunciations of Spinozism in the writings of orthodox theologians were just a rhetorical ploy used by opponents of heterodoxy and freethinking. References to *Spinozismus* are thus frequently dismissed as empty polemical rhetoric, routinely invoked by academics and preachers, Calvinist, Catholic, Lutheran, Arminian and Mennonite. They are all, so it is argued, more or less reducible to a claim that Spinozism was just 'atheism' and little more. Spinozism, these scholars maintain, was nothing definable, or specific, just a phantom of certain theologians' polemical repertoire, part of a vocabulary of theological disputation and denunciation.

⁹ F. Akkerman and H. G. Hubbeling, 'The Preface to Spinoza's Posthumous Works (1677) and its author, Jarig Jelles (c.1619/20–1683)', in *LIAS. Sources and Documents relating to the Early Modern History of Ideas*, VI, (1979), 103–9; and Jarig Jelles, 'Voorreeden' in *ibid.*, 120–3; see also Leszek Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans église. La Conscience religieuse et le lien confessionnel au XVII^e siècle*, (1969; repr. Paris, 1987), 220–5.

¹⁰ see Paolo Casini, 'Spinoza, il materialismo e i radicali liberi', *Rivista di filosofia* xcvi (2006), 387–408, here 387–90; Harvey Chisick, 'Interpreting the Enlightenment', in *The European Legacy* xiii (2008), 35–57, here especially p. 42; my usage of Spinozism, 'repose implicitement sur une permanence du spinozisme, dont le nom de Spinoza serait le garant,' holds Antoine Liliti, 'alors que sa pensée a fait l'objet d'un grand nombre d'interprétations divergentes, et ce dès le XVIII^e siècle'.¹⁰ This last claim, echoing Daniel Roche, that in the eighteenth century Spinoza was interpreted in a bewildering variety of ways, is simply untenable. Rather the opposite is true. In fact, there was little variation in interpretation, Spinoza always representing rejection of all final ends and divine providence, the impossibility of miracles and Revelation, the proto-evolutionist view (so detested by Voltaire) that nature creates itself, oneness of substance, non-existence of spiritual entities separate from bodies and the non-existence of reward and punishment in the hereafter. Furthermore, he stands for freedom of thought, speech and the press, the determined character of human and all other behaviour, and the thesis that morality is a purely social phenomenon with no theological content, culminating in the claim that the democratic republic is the best kind of politics and ecclesiastical authority something that must be drastically curtailed. *Antiphilosophes*, *Lumières modérées* and *Lumières radicales*, all alike concur as to what Spinoza and Spinozism signified. Contrary to Liliti, these close convergences hold throughout. See Antoine Liliti, 'Comment écrit-on l'histoire intellectuelle des Lumières? Spinozisme, radicalisme et philosophie' in *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales*, lxiv (2009), 171–206, here 188–9.

There is much evidence to suggest that this argument is quite wrong. In fact, Dutch Spinozism *was* a distinct, coherent and lasting creed and one about which theologians of almost every stripe had good reason to be deeply agitated and alarmed. One of the more penetrating literary depictions of Spinoza and Spinozism in the later Dutch Golden Age culture was that penned by the famous Frisian preacher, Balthasar Bekker (1634–98). Soon after moving from Friesland to the province of Holland, in 1674, the then forty-year old (and not yet famous) theologian visited the by then ailing Spinoza at The Hague. Very probably, Bekker arranged to see him at his lodgings, their meeting occurring at some point during the period 1674–6. Years later, in his continuation of Hornius's ecclesiastical history, published in 1683, Bekker described his encounter with Spinoza, in the following terms:¹¹ Spinoza moved from there [i.e. Rijnsburg] to The Hague where, in conversation with me, he acknowledged the aforesaid book [*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*] as his own. Regarding his life, I heard it affirmed by those who knew him, and found myself when I was with him, no lack of either morality or courtesy. He maintained himself by preparing with precision all kinds of lenses, needed for observational science [gesichtkunde]; and lived his life quietly, unmarried, until he left this world in the year 1677, leaving behind him works even more erroneous than those he had published.

In his church history of 1683, Bekker appraised Spinoza's impact on Dutch society in the following way: 'one has to admit that Spinoza's views have spread and become rooted all too far and too much in all parts and social orders, that they have infected many of the best minds, including among the residences of the great; and that people of very ordinary status enraptured by [his views] as if by something divine, have been brought to godlessness. Meanwhile, as a result, the number increases of those who profess religion and religious doctrine only to conform, and more from human than divine considerations. And if that continues, God help us, what a blow through the heavy fall of such a mass of people will be given to the frame of God's House.'¹² This assessment tallies with a great deal of

¹¹ Balthasar Bekker, *Kort Begryp der algemene Kerkelyke Historien Zedert het Jaar 1666 daar Hornius eindigt tot den Jare 1684* (1683; Amsterdam, 1686).

¹² Bekker, *Kort Begryp*, 39; further on Bekker and the Religious Enlightenment, see A. C. Fix, *Fallen Angels. Balthasar Bekker, Spirit Belief and Confessionalism in the Seventeenth Century Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht, 1999); J. W. Buisman and Jan de Vet, 'Rede, Openbaring en de strijd tegen bijgeloof: de vroege Verlichting in de Republiek', in E. van der Wall and Leo Wessels (eds.) *Een veelzijdige verstandhouding. Religie en Verlichting in Nederland 1650–1850* (Nijmegen, 2007), 80–95.

other comment identifying a dramatic shift in attitudes in the 1670s and 1680s, a shift engineered by what the Rotterdam Remonstrant minister Johannes Molinaeus in 1692 called the 'seductive philosophy' of Spinoza, Hobbes and Meyer's *Philosophia*. Thereby, 'countless intellects and minds in our Fatherland have been poisoned' and led to reject Christ not only philosophically and openly, but at least as often in the concealed manner described by Bekker, that is, by pretending to be Christians.¹³

Bekker summarizes the doctrine of open and concealed Spinozism in six principal points:

1. That there is no substance, or being, other than God and that all creatures are but modes or aspects of God.
2. That this one substance has two essential properties (that we can discern), one being extension and the other thought, with an infinite number of others about which we know nothing.
3. That everything depends on an infinite number of causes which follow from one another in an infinite order and in infinite ways.
4. That, hence, nothing, and no action, is good or evil in itself.
5. That the Holy Scriptures are not originally from God and that their [human] authors erred in many things.
6. That miracles occur only owing to natural causes and are hence explicable [only in natural terms].

This summary of Spinoza's doctrine by Bekker helps us to understand more clearly what the chronic philosophical, cultural and theological fracturing that lent so much animosity and bitterness to Dutch theological controversies in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was ultimately about. The Bekker furore of 1691–4 over the question whether demonic power actually exists and whether the Devil can exert an influence over human life was one of these public controversies and one which particularly fed the angry suspicions of the orthodox. In the eyes of the orthodox, the more liberal theologians of a Cartesian or Cartesio-Cocceian bent like the famous Leiden Cartesian professor of theology, Christopher Wittichius (1625–87), or Bekker himself, were intent on making major concessions to philosophical reason in their theology. By cutting back

¹³ Johannes Molinaeus, *De Betoverde Werelt van Balthazar Bekker [...] Onderzocht en Wederleydt* (Rotterdam, 1692), 24–5; Jonathan Israel, 'The Bekker Controversies as a Turning-Point in Dutch Culture and Thought', *Dutch Crossing. A Journal of Low Countries Studies* xx (1996), 5–21.

the scope of the supernatural, they were both encouraging the growth of Socinianism and opening the door to 'Spinozism'.

Among the Collegiants, it may have been only the philosophical Socinians who embraced or selected elements from Spinozism whether more or less openly, or more clandestinely, but all Socinians had to face the charge that they were replacing theology with philosophical reason. 'L'objection la plus générale, que l'on propose contre eux', explains Bayle in his *Dictionnaire*, 'est qu'en refusant de croire ce que leur paroît opposé aux Lumières Philosophiques et de soumettre leur foi aux Mystères inconcevables de la religion chrétienne, ils fraient le chemin au Pyrrhonisme, au Déisme, à l'Athéisme.'¹⁴ It was an accusation that seemed to him essentially justified. For in denying the divinity of Scripture 'on renverse toute la Révélation, ensuite de quoi tout n'est que dispute de philosophes.'¹⁵

At the same time, Dutch Socinianism with a Spinozistic bent must have extended considerably further than the boundaries of the Collegiant movement, because the latter's free open, mostly undisturbed, meetings of non-church Christians rejecting the Trinity were permitted only by the civic authorities in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Rijnsburg (and even then precariously and solely on a purely *de facto* basis). Elsewhere such conventicles were effectively forbidden in the United Provinces, but there were many places where highly unorthodox religion with a strong rational and anti-Trinitarian bent also spread under cover of a sometimes elaborate clandestinity, often assuming a rather different character from that of the Collegiant movement proper. It therefore seems safe to assume that Socinian variants of Spinozism did indeed ramify widely as part of the broader penetration of 'seductive philosophy' along the lines described by Bekker, Molinaeus and others.

Thus, the *Cérémonies et coutûmes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, effectively the world's first comprehensive encyclopedia of religion, edited in the 1720s and early 1730s by Jean-Frédéric Bernard (1683?–1744), the publisher son of a refugee Huguenot minister, at Amsterdam, in seven volumes, handsomely illustrated with hundreds of engravings by Bernard Picart, was by no means sowing confusion or being absurdly vague by including 'Spinozism' as a form of religion and as a potent factor in the development of several different strands of fringe Dutch religious heterodoxy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, while at

¹⁴ Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, IV, 236–7.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the same time identifying Spinoza as a key influence in the rise of 'Deism'. This extremely important compendium also appeared in English, at London, in the 1730s, the latter version being the work of an unknown hand referred to on the title-page of the first volume simply as 'a Gentleman, sometime since of St John's College in Oxford'. Far from being averse to attracting readers' attention to Spinoza, this gentleman's translation helpfully points 'our curious readers' to where they may 'find a full account of Baruch or Benedict Spinoza in Bayle's Dictionary, to which may be added his Life, published by Maximilian Lucas, one of his Disciples'.¹⁶

Without doubt, then, Socinianism, and within it the philosophical current close to Spinozism, extended albeit in a necessarily veiled fashion well beyond those groups of Collegiants and Unitarians who more or less openly proclaimed their anti-Trinitarianism.¹⁷ The comments of Bekker, Molinaeus, Van Til and others about the advance of 'seductive philosophy' in the 1670s and 1680s make it clear that crypto-Spinozist sentiments allied to crypto-Socinianism profoundly penetrated the thinking of individuals officially belonging to the Reformed Church, among them Koerbagh's elder brother, Johannes Koerbagh, a pro-Socinian theology candidate who in effect became a Spinozistic theologian.¹⁸ In addition, there was in the United Provinces a variety of newly-formed clandestine religious groups and currents operating outside the Reformed Church whose spiritual leaders showed a definite inclination to embrace strands of Spinoza's system.¹⁹

¹⁶ [Jean-Frédéric Bernard and Bernard Picart] *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Several Nations of the Known World* (7 vols., London, 1731–7), VI, 225; on the subject of Spinoza the French version is subtly subversive in a number of ways, for instance, stressing the 'considerable similarity', as it has been put, 'between Spinoza's pantheism and the metaphysics of Chinese intellectuals; both appeared to identify the Supreme being with Nature itself'; see L. Hunt, M. Jacob and W. Mijndhardt (eds.) *The Book that Changed Europe. Picart and Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), 9; the authors of the latter work appear to be unaware of the first English version published under the title *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs* of 1731, see *ibid.*, 315–16; the account presented in this work of the encyclopaedia's history in English needs correcting since the English version appeared, at least partially, in two different editions (and, again, partially, two different translations) bearing distinct titles, in the first case styled *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Several Nations of the Known World* (7 vols., London, 1731–7), as in the set at Magdalen College, Oxford, and in the other, entitled *The Ceremonies and Religious Customs of the Various Nations of the Known World* (7 vols., London, 1733–7) printed for 'Claude Du Bosc', as in the set in the Bodleian, at Oxford.

¹⁷ Joris van Eijnatten, *Mutua Christianorum tolerantia. Irenicism and Toleration in the Netherlands: the Stinstra Affair 1740–1745* (Florence, 1998), 81–9.

¹⁸ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 185–96; Michiel Wielema, *The March of the Libertines. Spinozists and the Dutch Reformed Church (1660–1750)*, 87.

¹⁹ Wielema, *March of the Libertines*, 14–16, 87, 121.

One of these groups was the Hattemists. While it remains a hotly disputed point in Dutch Church history whether Hattemism, a strictly forbidden fringe group, forged by Pontiaan van Hattem (1641–1706), shortly after Spinoza's death, really had any meaningful links to Spinozism, the *Cérémonies et coutûmes religieuses* did not doubt that it did. Indeed, most contemporary or near contemporary sources classify Hattemism as a movement in which Van Hattem and his disciples 'added', as the English version of the *Cérémonies* puts it, 'some of their own notions to the system of Spinoza, and interrelated the whole with the mystical notions of the Pietists'. Meeting furtively in private homes, the Hattemists formed a movement that pervaded the towns and some villages of Zeeland in the late seventeenth century and also adjoining parts of North Brabant and South Holland. The *Cérémonies* characterizes them as a group that met only in the strictest secrecy, taking stringent precautions to admit no-one they could not trust. This was due to what *Cérémonies*'s editors call 'the grievous penalties inflicted upon them by an edict of the States of Holland' commanding that 'they shall be banished or cast into prison, and severely punished as enemies to virtue, to divine worship, and disturbers of the public peace, that their books shall be suppressed, and the authors, printers and publishers proceeded against as directed in the edict [of the States, of 1678] about Spinozism'.²⁰

Certainly, the *Cérémonies* readily acknowledges that there was also a secular, libertine tendency, and in particular writers 'who have lately renewed in Holland', as the English version expresses it, 'the system of the "Soul of the World" and the eternity of both, [who] might with justice be reckoned Spinozists and Deists more than Hattem'. Bernard's text refers at this point to the book *Ingebeelde Chaos* [Imaginary Chaos] by Hendrik Wyermars (dates unknown), the defiant young Spinozist rather brutally sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment by the Amsterdam city government, in 1710, for infringing the ban on publishing Spinozistic books.²¹ But the exact boundary between this tendency and clandestine Spinozistic Christianity was far from clear. Wyermars, explains the *Cérémonies*, maintained 'that the Trinity is only three modifications of the Supreme Being, that Extension is essential to God, and is the second person, that Creation is from all eternity, etc. He and some others, namely one Deurhoff, have had some followers, and held as they do still some small assemblies, in

²⁰ Ibid., 28; [Bernard and Picart] *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs*, VI, 225.

²¹ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 13, 132, 252, 265, 322–7.

a very private manner, to avoid the persecutions which the magistrates might make against them'.²²

But if the world of Dutch anti-Trinitarian heterodoxy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century down to around 1720 was fragmented, variegated and highly divisive, especially after the quarrel about the Spinozist proclivities of Johannes Bredenburg led to the formal split that openly divided the Dutch Collegiants into Spinozistic-Socinian and anti-Spinozist, 'Biblicist' anti-Trinitarians in the 1680s, it was the Spinozist-Socinian Collegiants who survived into the eighteenth century as the most coherent force. In this specific form, Dutch Socinianism, or Unitarianism, can be said to have been part of a growing Western phenomenon rapidly taking on rather formidable dimensions across the trans-Atlantic world. This too is confirmed, albeit cautiously, by the *Cérémonies et coutûmes religieuses*. Although in many ways itself a subversive, Deistic work, and an integral part of the Radical Enlightenment,²³ its account of Socinianism was restrained by the knowledge that anti-Trinitarianism remained strictly illegal in the United Provinces after the States of Holland's anti-Socinian decree of 1653. But if the editors prudently accounted Socinianism something extraordinarily 'odious and dangerous', they nevertheless also stressed 'the astonishing progress [Socinianism] has made through Europe' and the 'subtle arguments and objections' it proposed.

The emergence of a Dutch Socinian stream combining Spinozism with a philosophically orientated conception of Christianity in the late seventeenth century not only shows marked affinities with but can be said to be integrally part of the same wider shift that in the eighteenth-century generated a politically and socially radical strand of Unitarianism, especially in England. For the early eighteenth century, the authors of the *Cérémonies*, not unlike Bayle, stressed the centrality of the philosophical tendency within Socinianism, maintaining that its claims extended far beyond merely anti-Trinitarianism. Since the Socinians believe that 'man was of his own nature mortal, even before the Fall, and was never endowed with original or primitive justice'; and that consequently, for them, there is no such thing as Original Sin, that no redeeming power can reside in sacraments or the spiritual functions of the clergy and that God 'might have

²² [Bernard and Picart], *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs*, VI, 227–8; Wielema, *March of the Libertines*, 142–6; on Deurhoff, see Hunt, Jacob and Mijnhart, *The Book*, 76–7.

²³ Silvia Berti, 'Bernard Picart e Jean-Frédéric Bernard dalla religione riformata al Deismo', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, cxvii, (2005), 974–1001, here 997.

forgiven the sins of mankind, and reconciled men with divine justice, and pardoned them, without the satisfaction of Christ', they effectively dismantled the entire edifice of conventional Christian theology.²⁴ Some thirty years later, the self-declared atheist Jacques André Naigeon (1738–1810), Diderot's disciple and d'Holbach's assistant, made the same point in his incisive article 'Unitaires' in the seventeenth volume of Diderot's and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, first published in 1765. Because of this, Naigeon added, the Socinians should not be considered a theological stream at all; rather 'il falloit les considérer comme une secte de philosophes, qui, pour ne pas choquer trop directement le culte et les opinions vraies ou fausses reçues alors, ne vouloient point afficher ouvertement le déisme pur, ni rejeter formellement et sans détours toute espèce de révélation; mais qui faisoient continuellement à l'égard de l'ancien et du nouveau Testament, ce qu'Épicure faisoit à l'égard des dieux qu'il admettoit verbalement, et qu'il détruisoit réellement.'²⁵

Looked at in this light, Socinianism as transmitted, or replicated, in Britain and later in America, in the form of organized philosophical Unitarianism, may be identified as the one lastingly significant religious ally of the Spinozistic radical tradition. It can be seen to have been the only intrinsically religious component of the Radical Enlightenment in the English-speaking world, as also elsewhere, and an enduring one, a tendency powerfully propagated in late eighteenth-century Britain and America by Joseph Priestley and such lesser figures such as John Jebb and William Frend. This was a current that can be said to have developed important ties throughout the trans-Atlantic context with the Radical Enlightenment both in general and, in particular, with Spinozism conceived as an underground creed. Although Priestley nowhere refers to any links with Spinoza or Spinozism, he does explicitly acknowledge in several places in his writings his sympathies for and his philosophical proximity, in most respects, to contemporary materialism and democratic radicalism as it evolved in France. So does John Jebb (1736–86), the Cambridge don forced out of Cambridge by the university academic 'inquisition', in 1775, on account (like Frend later) of his heterodoxy and democratic reformism.²⁶

²⁴ [Bernard and Picart] *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs*, vi, 208–9.

²⁵ André Naigeon, art. 'Unitaires', in Diderot and d'Alembert (eds.) *Encyclopédie* xvii, 388.

²⁶ On Jebb, see Anthony Page, *John Jebb and the Enlightenment Origins of British Radicalism* (Westport, Conn., 2003); on Frend, see Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge. The Radical Years* (Oxford, 1988), 84–117.

In particular, four basic affinities deserve to be noted. First, despite at the same time retaining a strongly theological component, and a fervent trust in Divine Providence ruling the universe, Priestleyan Unitarianism embraced a Spinozistic-type philosophical determinism and materialism, conflating spirit and matter into one.²⁷ Secondly, in contrast to nearly all other eighteenth-century British religious movements, Priestleyan Unitarianism embraced an extremely radical and sweeping political reform programme, not unlike the *philosophisme* of Diderot and d'Holbach. This programme more or less completely repudiated the existing British constitution, mixed monarchy, and the principle of aristocracy, and urged the adoption of representative democracy. Thirdly, Priestleyan Unitarianism shared, albeit its religious tone was different, in the contention of *philosophisme* that practically everything was wrong with the prevailing structures of ideas, education, authority, and morality in Christendom and that this was essentially the fault of priestcraft, 'superstitious' rites, mystifying theology and false religion, or what Jebb called the 'contagion of corrupted doctrine' spread 'by the craft and cunning of a designing and despotic priesthood.'²⁸ Finally, both Spinozism and Priestleyan Unitarianism embraced a comprehensive rather than a limited Lockean toleration that sought to shield non-Christians no less than heterodox Christians, and would finally free atheists too from intolerance, persecution and penal laws.²⁹

Hence, both wings of the Radical Enlightenment shared a millenarian expectation that a new dawn was coming that would be ushered in by the demolition of all existing religious attitudes and forms. Priestley gave eloquent expression to this third and perhaps most comprehensive affinity in the dedication to his colleague, the Unitarian minister Theophilus Lindsey, of his *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity in two volumes* (Birmingham, 1782). 'The gross darkness of that night', he wrote, 'which has for many centuries obscured our holy religion, we may clearly see, is

²⁷ Aaron Garrett, 'Human Nature', in K. Haakonssen (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy* (2 vols. Cambridge, 2006) I, 160–233, here 166–7.

²⁸ John Jebb, *The Works Theological, Medical, Political and Miscellaneous*, 3 vols., (London, 1787), III, 161; one might also link this sweeping rejectionism of the Unitarian Enlightenment to at least some of the late eighteenth-century German neologists, see Ernestine van der Wall, 'Religie en Verlichting: een veelzijdige verstandhouding', in van der Wall and Leo Wessels (eds.) *Een veelzijdige verstandhouding*, 13–35, here 28–32.

²⁹ J. E. Bradley, 'Toleration and Movements of Christian Reunion, 1660–1789', in S. J. Brown and T. Tackett (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity VII. Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution, 1660–1815*, (Cambridge, 2006), 364–5.

past; the morning is opening upon us; and we cannot doubt but that the light will increase, and extend itself more and more, unto the perfect day. Happy are they who contribute to diffuse the pure light of this everlasting gospel.³⁰

These were affinities which necessarily led Priestley to associate his name with radical thinkers, persons dismissed by most contemporary opinion as out-and-out libertines and 'atheists'. Thus when reissuing Anthony Collins's tract on liberty and necessity in 1779, he made a point of explicitly proclaiming himself an exponent of 'philosophical necessity' in the same sense as Collins, and of providing a preface to the text by his own hand. Here he grants that 'it has been unfortunate for the doctrine of necessity, that some of its first and ablest defenders were either unbelievers in Christianity, or at least generally considered to be such.' He refuses to disown either Hobbes or Collins. Rather he styles Collins 'a man of irreproachable morals, and a most excellent magistrate' and seeks to justify his scorn for churchmen. He does so by presenting him as someone who 'saw in a strong light the absurdity of the established system; and the freedom of his publications having given much offence to the clergy, he was irritated by their opposition to him; and from this cause it is very possible he might be instigated to throw as many difficulties in their way as he could, whether he was an unbeliever or not.'³¹

Besides basic affinities of principle and political orientation, there were also of course powerful tactical reasons why such an intellectual alliance within the bosom of the Radical Enlightenment should endure. If Spinoza had much to gain from his collaboration with the Socinian Collegiants, in terms of friendship, support and an urban network for propagating his publications and influence, the Dutch Socinians had found much of use to them in their proximity to Spinoza. In the first place a Bible criticism and theory of priestcraft of unrivalled force and sophistication with which to reinforce their effort to discredit all the orthodox churches and nearly all the Dissenters as corruptors of Revelation and impostors; in the second place, a conception of morality as something which men must construct on the basis of reason and Christ's example alone; and, finally, a philosophy which helped buttress their pleas for a wider toleration.

³⁰ Joseph Priestley, *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, 2 vols., (Birmingham, 1782) I, Dedication, v.

³¹ Joseph Priestley, 'Preface' to Anthony Collins, *A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Liberty* (Birmingham, 1779), xi.

This last had been a highly-sensitive and notorious point in the later seventeenth century. Thus, for example, the most highly rated and longest remembered among the early German refutations of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, that published at Jena with a preface dated April 1674, by Johann Musaeus, was a ninety-six page tract, dedicated to Duke Johann Friedrich of Braunschweig-Lüneburg. Entitled *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, Quo Auctor quidam Anonymus, conatu improbo, demonstratum ivit, Libertatem Philosophandi...Ad veritatis lancem examinatus*. This highlights what it considered to be the sweepingly subversive cultural, social and intellectual implications of Spinoza's 'freedom to philosophize'. A vigorous defender of church power and the princely court system prevailing at the time in Germany, Musaeus, reciting numerous quotations from Spinoza's text, strove to show that the anonymous author sought to overthrow Christianity and replace it with a comprehensive *Naturalismus*, denying the possibility of miracles and everything supernatural.³² Spinoza, he argues, is 'second to none' as an advocate of a wide-ranging, pernicious toleration, like that to be found in Amsterdam, one which will legitimize all strands of opinion and remove all barriers presently operative against the Socinians and other anti-Trinitarians in Germany.

Even more important, though, for his alliance with Socinianism than his theory of toleration and freedom of expression, had been Spinoza's attempt to detach Christ from the orthodox churches and his comprehensive assault on the priesthood, whether Catholic, Protestant or Greek Orthodox, as impostors. In this respect no other philosopher could possibly have been as useful to fully-fledged Socinians. For Spinoza, like Lodewijk Meyer, sees religious teaching based on Scripture not only as playing a positive role in teaching the rudiments of true morality, but even as an indispensable support for society and for the moral order, since most people cannot be philosophers and must discipline their lives on the basis of religion. Spinoza combined his skeptical-critical view of the Bible with the most devastating attack on ecclesiastical authority and the traditions of the churches yet seen, and then combined both with a view of Christ as the supreme moral teacher whose philosophy is embedded in the Gospels. Coinciding with and reinforcing the Socinian understanding of the role of Christ, Spinoza's arguments enabled both Socinians as well as naturalists to claim that 'true Christianity', the genuine teaching

³² Johann Musaeus, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* [...] *Ad veritatis lancem examinatus* (Jena, 1674), Preface.

of Christ, in no way corresponds to the corrupted doctrines of the theologians and ecclesiastics who had, according to Spinoza, utterly perverted the Christian religion ever since the time of the Apostles.³³

Spinoza claimed that Christ was not a 'prophet', a term that has a somewhat pejorative resonance in his terminology, but rather someone whose mind was adapted 'to the universal beliefs and doctrines held by all mankind, that is to those concepts which are universal and true'. On this basis, Spinoza could hope to underpin his collaboration with the Collegiants and build a new kind of reformism. In particular he looked forward to the day when religion was finally 'reduced to the extremely few, very simple dogmas that Christ taught to his own' and which consisted essentially in the practice of justice and charity alone.³⁴

It is this, arguably, that explains how it was possible that the affinities between Spinozism and Unitarianism, originally forged by Spinoza himself in his dealings and correspondence with Balling, Jelles, Glazemaker and Rieuwertsz in the 1650s and 1660s, should not just survive within different strands of Dutch heterodoxy in the later Golden Age among the Bredenburg Collegiants, Hattemists, Deufhofisten, Leenhofisten and other fringe religious groups, but continue to thrive after these heterodoxies themselves died away during the course of the eighteenth century. Eventually, in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the alliance between philosophical materialism close to Spinozism and Unitarianism assumed the dimensions of a major factor in the trans-Atlantic diffusion of Radical Enlightenment.

It is particularly remarkable that in the 1770s and 1780s, Joseph Priestley and John Jebb, both determinists and materialists as well as Unitarians, refused to reject outright in the horrified manner characteristic of virtually all other theologians and philosophers the materialism and utilitarian moral fervour they encountered in the clandestinely published *Système de la nature* by d'Holbach. This key radical work appeared in 1770 under a deliberately false attribution on the title-page to 'Mirabaud', and contained input from others of d'Holbach's circle, including Naigeon and probably Diderot. In their attacks on this powerfully destabilizing text, Voltaire and Frederick the Great were undoubtedly more horrified by its democratic aspects, its repudiation of monarchy and aristocracy, and its claim that

³³ Jonathan Israel, 'Introduction' to Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. J. I. Israel, (Cambridge, 2007), xvii.

³⁴ Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 161.

all the population, as distinct from a small elite, should be enlightened than they were by the book's unabashed atheism and materialism. But the work's democratic tendency and insistence on enlightening everyone were apparently no more of a problem for Priestley or Jebb than were its materialism and determinism.

After studying the *Système de la nature*, Priestley, impressed by d'Holbach's arguments against the soul's immortality, felt it was 'absolute necessary to abandon the notion of a soul' if Christianity was to remain compatible with the latest philosophy and science. In 1777, in the preface to his *Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit* (London, 1777), Priestley acknowledged that until the early 1770s, he, like so many others, had unquestioningly believed 'that man had a soul distinct from his body' and believed this 'soul to be a substance so intirely distinct from matter, as to have no property in common with it.' Only via 'a slow and laborious investigation' that was both personal and yet part of a wider process characteristic of his time had he been able to free himself from this together with many other 'vulgar prejudices, and to reject many gross corruptions, as I now deem them'. From his new standpoint, arguing for the materiality of the human soul, it seemed 'unaccountable in Mr Locke' that having acknowledged, as he does, that there is no clear evidence of two substances in man, he yet resolutely continued to think 'it more probable' that the faculty of thinking 'inhered in a different substance' from the body, namely an immaterial soul.³⁵

For while Locke had seen that there was 'no real inconsistency between the known properties of the body, and those that have generally been referred to the mind', he had not concluded, as Priestly and Jebb considered that a true philosopher ought to have done, 'that the whole substance of man, that which supports all his powers and properties, was one uniform substance' and that, hence, man does not consist 'of two substances' as most philosophers and divines insist, but only of one (as Spinoza maintained).³⁶ He was not greatly flustered by this conclusion, however, as 'happily', or so he maintained, 'the principles of [Christianity] are as repugnant to the notion [of the soul], as those of any modern philosophy.'³⁷

³⁵ Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 31.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 32, 73, 218–20.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 88; Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth-Century Background* (1940; Harmondsworth, 1962), 169.

Meanwhile, Jebb studied the *Système de la nature* even before Priestley, in 1771–2, three years before his forced resignation from his fellowship at Jesus College, taking careful notes and agreeing with much of what he read. From his notes it plainly emerges that he not only thoroughly approved of the author's [i.e. d'Holbach's and his friends'] rejection of all the *mystères* in orthodox Christianity and of their view of Jesus as 'un vrai théiste, dont la religion a été peu à peu corrompue' but also of much more.³⁸ It was especially on questions of moral philosophy that he agreed with its author, who at that time he still assumed to be 'Mirabaud', though some time later he reported that the work 'is now known to have been written, not by Mirabaud, but by a society of the most eminent French unbelievers'. He felt that the author had exactly 'expressed my idea of the religion of nature so far as relates to our duty to our neighbour', and where the French writer 'conceives this to be the voice of nature, I only differ from him in thinking it is the voice of God'.³⁹ This religion of nature, he explains, is summed up in the words: 'sois juste, parceque l'équité est la soutien du genre humain. Sois bon, parceque la bonté enchaîne tous les coeurs'⁴⁰ Jebb, who had also read other recent French works including Marmontel's *Belisaire*, agreed with Priestley in urging the need to purge Christianity of its allegedly irrational baggage, and viewed the doctrine that matter is an active not a passive substance as a valuable advance. Any soundly based Christian conception of the mind, he was convinced, must be materialist and would leave scant room for the traditional Christian notion of the soul.

It is possible to view Spinozist Radical Enlightenment, as it developed in its French materialist form in Diderot and d'Holbach and their many disciples, and 'Spinozistic' philosophical Unitarianism as two arms of the same philosophical system, the system which turned out to be crucially formative of the modern Western core values of democracy, equality, individual liberty, full separation of church and state, and freedom of thought, expression and the press. Nevertheless, Spinozism as a late seventeenth-century Dutch creed was not the same as philosophical Unitarianism, for all the materialism of Priestley and Jebb. There remained the residual but crucial differences over whether morality was the voice of God rather than the voice of nature, and over the nature of divine Providence and

³⁸ Jebb, *The Works*, II, 165–6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 167–8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 167–72; Page, *John Jebb*, 100.

man's salvation. If the alliance proved enduring, it is also true that clashes between atheistic Spinozism and philosophical Unitarianism were inevitable. There are several interesting instances of these.

In Priestley's case, this tension tinged with conscious ambivalence dates back at least to 1774, when Priestley visited Paris and met many of the intellectual luminaries of the French capital. He had disciplined himself, as he records in his autobiography, having been forewarned, not to be too taken aback 'to find all the philosophical persons to whom I was introduced at Paris, unbelievers in Christianity, and even professed atheists'. Opposed to key strands of their thought, he could never fully overcome his underlying prejudice against both the French and Dutch peoples, though he still maintained that 'in literary and philosophical pursuits' the Parisians showed 'a spirit and a liberality [...] at which the English ought to blush'.⁴¹ Once in America, however, his dislike of atheism hardened. When it came to Constantin François Volney's writings which included a materialist catechism, the *Law of Nature or Principles of Morality, deduced from the physical constitution of Mankind and the Universe* (Philadelphia, 1796), a work which appeared originally in French in 1793 and which, besides appearing in America was published in abbreviated form 'for the instruction of the people' in London, likewise in 1796,⁴² Priestley drew the line and reacted indignantly.

Priestley was a materialist and a determinist who regarded his philosophy and science as inseparable from his 'attempts to defend Christianity, and to free it from those corruptions which prevent its reception with philosophical and thinking persons, whose influence with the vulgar [he added, optimistically], and the unthinking is very great'.⁴³ Volney's system as set out in his *Ruins* and abbreviated in his *Law of Nature* denied the possibility of any kind of divine Providence precisely as did d'Holbach and the Spinozists, and was clearly based on Diderot's, d'Holbach's and also Helvétius' philosophy. But it went further than any of these authors in actively and directly seeking to replace Christianity in the minds of the common people with the core doctrines of the new materialist secular creed. His *Law of Nature* was a work of ethics which, deriving as it did 'from the very nature of things', according to its radical-minded American editor, 'becomes like them fixed and immutable: whilst, on the contrary,

⁴¹ Joseph Priestley, *Autobiography* (Bath, 1970), 110–111.

⁴² Constantin François Volney, *An Abridgement of the Law of Nature; or Catechism of French Citizens* (London, 1796).

⁴³ Priestley, *Autobiography*, 111.

in all the theological systems, by being built upon arbitrary opinions, indemonstrable in themselves, and frequently absurd, [morality] fluctuates, declines, and perishes with them, leaving mankind in a state of absolute depravity'.⁴⁴ Here, finally, was something Priestley refused to tolerate.

Now himself firmly settled nearby in Pennsylvania, Priestley in the mid 1790s lashed out at the secular materialism of Volney, openly scorning 'unbelievers more ignorant than Mr Paine [such as] Mr Volney, Lequinio and others in France' and deploring that 'in the writings of Hume, Mr Gibbon, Voltaire, Mr Volney—there is nothing of solid argument; all abound in gross mistakes and misrepresentations'. To this, Volney replied, much in the grain of Koerbagh and Meyer, by denouncing the intellectual inconsistency of the Unitarians and especially of Priestley himself. 'You say in your preface [p. xv]: "what is manifestly contrary to natural reason, cannot be received by it" and, further on, in the text, that "with respect to intellect, men and brute animals are born in the same state having the same external senses which are the only inlets to all ideas, and consequently, the source of all knowledge and of all mental habits they ever acquire'. 'With these two single phrases', Volney confidently expected, he could thoroughly 'overturn the whole edifice of [Priestley's] faith'.⁴⁵

This charge of inconsistency and of contradicting their own professions of unqualified and unreserved reliance on reason as man's sole guide had featured in the radical secular freethinkers' evaluations of Socinianism and the philosophical Collegiants from the outset. The Socinians argued that notwithstanding certain difficulties, which need to be resolved through use of reason, the Bible is the Word of God and hence clear in principle as well as possessed of a sacred status quite distinct from that of other texts. The *recta ratio* which Socinianism invoked to interpret Scripture, moreover, usually worked by citing parallels, comparing textual contexts and invoking practical common sense, elucidating Scripture from Scripture as it were, without reference to any external criterion or aid other than that of the *Sanctus Spiritus* [Holy Ghost]; hence only in a very limited sense did the Socinians' invocation of reason depart from orthodox Lutheran and Calvinist insistence on the principle of *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*

⁴⁴ Constantin François Volney, *The Law of Nature or Principles of Morality Deduced from the Physical Constitution of Mankind and the Universe* (Philadelphia, 1796) 'Advertisement of the Editor', v–vi.

⁴⁵ [Constantin François Volney], *Volney's Answer to Doctor Priestley on his Pamphlet entitled Observations upon the Increase of Infidelity* (Philadelphia, 1797), 11.

[Scripture is the interpreter of itself].⁴⁶ The philosophical Collegiants who aligned themselves with Spinoza in the 1650s and 1660s may indeed be said to have gone a step further and sought to fuse systematic philosophical rationalism with the Socinian legacy. But did they succeed? Was it possible for them to succeed?

Recommending an external arbiter in the shape of philosophy, Lodewijk Meyer, in his *Philosophia S.Scripturae Interpres* (1666) expressly rebuked the Socinians and Spinoza's Collegiant allies, while contending that the Bible's obscurity can never be elucidated by any other means than the 'true philosophy'.⁴⁷ They were at fault above all, he held, in arguing that it is 'reason alone' that resolves the obscurities of Scripture and then, whenever encountering the slightest difficulty in interpreting a Scriptural passage, falling back on the aid and grace of the Holy Ghost.⁴⁸ The fiercely anti-Socinian English Puritan divine, John Wilson, writing in 1676, while detesting Meyer's text willingly granted that it was more cogent logically and went much further than the Socinians in undermining the authority of Scripture; the Cartesian scholar and Bible critic, Louis Wolzogen (1633–90) was less implacably hostile but equally clear that Meyer's Bible criticism was something quite distinct from that of the Socinians. Equally, the great German critic, Niklaus Hieronymus Gundling, who thought that too many unorthodox writers were being labeled 'atheistic' in his day, and who boldly championed Hobbes against the charge of 'atheism', nevertheless did not hesitate to label Meyer's *Philosophia* an 'atheistisches Buch'.⁴⁹

Meyer had stressed the general, overall 'obscurity' of the Biblical texts and what he saw as the impossibility of elucidating them by the methods adopted by the Collegiants, a conclusion inherent also—but there silently so—in Spinoza's Bible criticism. The 'Belgick Exercitator', as Wilson calls Lodewijk Meyer, 'rises higher in denying the Scriptures perspicuity than any that I have ever met with,' though only a few pages later he says much the same of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.⁵⁰ Spinoza's Bible criticism is far more sophisticated than that of Lodewijk Meyer and it is clear that,

⁴⁶ C. L. Thijsen-Schoute, *Nederlands Cartesianisme*, (1954; repr. Utrecht, 1989), 396–7.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Israel, 'Meyer, Koerbagh and the Radical Enlightenment Critique of Socinianism', *Geschiedenis van de wijsbegerte in Nederland* xiv (2003), 197–208, here 200–3.

⁴⁸ Thijsen-Schoute, *Nederlands Cartesianisme*, 398.

⁴⁹ *Lettres sur la Vie et sur la mort de Monsieur Louis de Wolzogue* (Amsterdam, 1692), 44; John Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter Asserted* (London, 1678), 17, 30; Niklaus Hieronymus Gundling, *Vollständige Historie der Gelahrtheit*, 5 vols., (Frankfurt-Leipzig, 1734–6), IV, 4928.

⁵⁰ Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 178.

without mentioning his friend's name, he is alluding to and criticizing him to some extent in the text of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether their respective views of Socinianism, of Collegiant involvement in philosophy, and the status of divine inspiration and the Holy Ghost, were really very different. Even so, unlike Meyer and Koerbagh, Spinoza nowhere expresses any direct criticism of Socinianism or the Collegiants. On the contrary, as we have seen, he goes out of his way, with his elaborate theory of Christ, to extend the hand of alliance to them.

Finally, it is possible to argue that Spinoza's alliance with the Socinians was something deeply-grounded in his philosophy and especially his theory of what religion is and how theology develops. His contention that 'disputes and schisms have ceaselessly disturbed the Church ever since apostolic times, and will surely never cease to trouble it'⁵¹ until the power of authorized, church-imposed theology is completely demolished and Christ's teaching slimmed down to its ethical core was fundamental to his own thought, but it was also a quintessentially Socinian concept. Here was the essential basis of an enduring alliance which lasted for over a century, permeating fringe religion in a remarkable fashion, and which finally unraveled only with the attempts of the likes of Volney and other disciples of d'Holbach, Helvétius and Diderot to turn atheistic materialism literally into a popular creed which could be taught to the people. Up to that point, though, it is fair to say that it was not only the irreligious but also the Unitarian Enlightenment that viewed traditional religion as 'a crutch for an immature humanity', or 'a pernicious fraud perpetrated and sustained by corrupt clerics.'⁵²

Spinoza, I have argued, had formed an enduring if not wholly untroubled alliance with the Socinians. This amounted in the eyes of most contemporaries to a convergence of traditions that made no sense at all from a Christian standpoint. Secular radicals, ranging from Meyer and Koerbagh to Volney, were inclined to agree. By contrast, Jelles, and later Jebb and Priestley, refused to agree that Christianity could not be harmoniously combined with deterministic one-substance doctrine. In Priestley's words, because both Materialists and Necessarians were some time ago generally unbelievers, it has been taken for granted that all necessarians,

⁵¹ Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 161.

⁵² M. A. Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, (Chicago, 2008), 271; D. Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment* (Princeton, 2008), 17.

and especially all materialists, must be deists, if not atheists. It has, however, sufficiently appeared from the writings of Dr. Hartley, Dr. Edwards, and many others, that all Necessarians are not unbelievers; and the same is, I hope, now the case, with respect to Materialists, who, as I have shewn at large, are the only consistent believers in revelation; the doctrine of a separate soul having been introduced from the heathen philosophy; and being irreconcilable with the Scripture account of a future state, viz. that of the resurrection of the dead at a future period, and not the continued existence of an immaterial soul, incapable of dying at all.⁵³

There was, then, a distinct element of contradiction in Priestley's thought, and in all late eighteenth-century British radical Dissent, that could never be entirely overcome. That God had permitted the long corruption of the Church, 'the gross darkness of that night which has for many centuries obscured our holy religion', as Priestley put it, in 1782,⁵⁴ permitting the general sway of superstition and tyranny over men, and doing so 'for the best of purposes', was something that Priestley's and Jebb's necessitarianism required them to argue. But this was a mystery impossible to explain with any 'reasoning', as was the fact that it was only now that He intended that 'superstition' should be altogether removed. Priestley, after becoming Unitarian minister in Birmingham, continued to believe the sole author of the corruption, superstition and tyranny was the 'same great being who is also now, in the course of his providence, employing these means to purge his floor.' But why 'so long a season of darkness' preceding 'the perfect day', and what exactly were 'the best of purposes'? And were the 'facts' surrounding Christ's crucifixion and resurrection really as well-grounded as Priestley incessantly urged the unbelieving likes of Hume, Helvétius and Gibbon to believe?⁵⁵

'That miracles are things in themselves possible', maintained Priestley, 'must be allowed, so long as it is evident that there is in nature a power equal to the working of them'. But was this a sound argument in terms of a rigorous philosophy of 'facts'? Rational Dissent, and especially the materialist Unitarianism of Priestley and Jebb, took the lead in the British

⁵³ Priestley, 'Preface' to Anthony Collins, *A Philosophical Inquiry*, xv.

⁵⁴ Priestley, *History of the Corruption of Christianity* i, dedication, v.

⁵⁵ Priestley, *History of the Corruption* ii, 449–54; E. N. Hiebert, 'The Integration of Revealed Religion and Scientific Materialism in the thought of Joseph Priestley', in L. Kieft and B. R. Willeford (eds.), *Joseph Priestley. Scientist, Theologian and Metaphysician* (London, 1980) 27–61, here, 34; F. W. Gibbs, *Joseph Priestley, Adventurer in Science and Champion of Truth* (London 1965), 90.

Radical Enlightenment between the 1760s and the 1790s and might appear to have rivaled the more purely philosophical, one-substance tradition deriving from Spinoza and Spinozism, at least in the English-speaking world. But Bentham, Paine and, after a point, Godwin, stood largely outside of this tradition and while Unitarian radicalism certainly led the way in Britain for a time, it suffered from a fatal inner defect, a set of insuperable intellectual inconsistencies following from its attempt to combine one-substance doctrine and science with a theology of divine Providence, Revelation, salvation and resurrection of the dead; these inconsistencies eventually shattered its underpinning. Although the sustained political and intellectual repression that arose in the 1790s and persisted in Britain down to the end of the Napoleonic War did not prevent most of the suppressed reform societies and organizations from reviving again in one form or another after 1815, the original intellectual umbrella, Rational Dissent itself, significantly failed to survive as an active radical movement in the next century.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Israel, 'Meyer, Koerbagh', 198, 200, 207–8; F. K. Donnelly, 'Joseph Towers and the Collapse of Rational Dissent', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, vi (1987), 31–8, here 32–5; K. R. Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth, Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (New York, 1998), 176–7.

BETWEEN ORTHODOXY AND HETERODOXY IN ITALIAN CULTURE
IN THE EARLY 1700S: GIAMBATTISTA VICO AND
PAOLO MATTIA DORIA

Enrico Nuzzo

I

In this essay I shall present the principal lines of a critical reconstruction of both the orthodox and the unorthodox features of the thought of two protagonists of Neapolitan culture—and not only Neapolitan culture—in the first half of the eighteenth century, Giambattista Vico and Paolo Mattia Doria; in particular I shall examine the theological premises of the Vichian conception of providence. Within this interpretative perspective, I shall argue, the reflection of Vico and of Doria can be placed on a distinctive spectrum of positions. On one side their thinking was marked by explicit opposition to tendencies within modern thought noted for their ‘heterodoxy’; on the other, it was distinguished by an interest in certain problems, by the use of particular conceptual resources and by theoretical outcomes which together made their thought in various aspects relatively ‘advanced’, and by no means reducible to the label ‘anti-modern’.

While Vico and Doria can be located together on such a spectrum, they also present relevant differences, which grew more marked over time. These reflect their choice of problems to address, their differing dispositions to ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘heterodoxy’, and above all their markedly different capacities for theoretical elaboration. In turn, such differences meant that the ‘intellectual consequences’ of their positions were also different, whether considered from a purely theoretical point of view or in terms of the diffusion and later incidence of their ideas. These ideas were not indeed widely diffused or appreciated in the panorama of eighteenth-century European culture, but later they would enjoy very different fortunes. While Doria’s ideas would be largely eclipsed after an initial impact, Vico’s, by contrast, would begin to attract significant interest in the nineteenth century, attaining by the second half of the twentieth century, and indeed increasingly in recent decades, a great and deserved reputation.

Thus Vico is widely recognised as a thinker who offered a novel, systematic-historical vision of all human phenomenology, founded on a

critique of the static anthropology associated with rationalism. His genetic approach to man was able to throw light on the most extensive range of human institutions and phenomena: on religion, language, myth, poetry, material practices and institutional forms (juridical, 'social', political), on the earliest expressions of understanding associated with a mythopoeic mentality, and on the most 'advanced' forms of cultural expression, such as philosophy. Recognition of the innovative audacity of many of Vico's arguments has lately reinforced the tendency to question the compatibility of his views with his declared 'orthodox' intentions. Both the spontaneity and effectiveness of an orthodox inspiration have been questioned, in the first place in relation to the idea of an immutable providential order of historical development.

Albeit in a less striking manner, the thought of Doria also lends itself to discussion along similar lines, and may thus be associated with tendencies (themselves more or less 'enlightened' or at least 'pre-Enlightened') which can be characterised as either 'modern' or 'pre-modern', as either ideologically 'radical' or 'moderate', 'traditional', and even 'reactionary'. At the level of metaphysical, gnoseological and religious discourse, on the one hand, his thought is increasingly seen as part of an 'anti-modern' initiative to revive traditional, 'Platonising' metaphysical perspectives. In this aspect, it has been depicted in the 'archaic' colours of Hermeticism and Platonic 'concord'. Yet these archaic features of his thought were also characteristic of 'heterodox' criticism of the 'victorious' current of modern philosophical-scientific thought. At the same time, Doria's contribution to 'civil' discourse makes it possible to connect him with positions strikingly critical of the oppressive political order established by modern states.

Adequately to consider this spectrum of possible interpretations would require addressing the methodological and interpretative problems raised by 'heterodox thought' between the second half of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Not least among these is the delicate question of deciding between the main historiographical categories employed in the relevant critical debates: between 'radical', 'moderate', 'official', 'conservative', 'reforming', 'Christian', and 'Catholic' Enlightenment (and thought more generally); and also between 'pre-Enlightenment', 'early Enlightenment', 'crise de la conscience Européenne', etc. Given that this essay cannot accommodate such an extended preliminary discussion, I shall limit myself to setting out some relevant considerations in the conclusion.

II

The question of Vico's 'orthodoxy' has been a recurrent crux in the history of interpretations of the Neapolitan thinker. The question has often been connected to that of the 'modern', or alternatively 'anti-modern', character of his cultural formation, and his attitude towards his own time. It is true that both of these questions, and especially the second, might now be regarded as having been virtually exhausted, the more so as they are often considered in terms heavily *a posteriori*, and also reductively dichotomous. Nevertheless, they remain difficult to set aside, for various reasons. The most important of these is that the question is not in fact without foundation, given the complexity of the course followed by Vico's thinking and of its shape as a whole. Moreover even conceptual pairings of the kind in question can—when understood to have the hermeneutic character of an historiographical 'ideal type'—serve a productive purpose by revealing the irreducible complexity of certain expressions of thought.

As to the question of religion in Vico, the constellation of relevant interpretations can be arranged between two poles, opposite in their content, but at bottom not so far apart in suggesting a markedly 'unitary' view of his thought. For those inclined to the first pole, Vico was an absolutely and coherently 'orthodox' thinker in the transparently Christian (or Platonic-Christian) inspiration of all his thought, and in his willingness to defend the truth of the religious tradition. Such an interpretation, at least in so far as it tends to treat the Neapolitan as an innocuous philosopher, seems for some time to have been in marked decline, even if it resurfaces here and there in modified, temperate forms.¹ At the other pole of

¹ This interpretation has been particularly characteristic of positions within Italian philosophical culture of Catholic inspiration, especially in reaction to the neo-idealistic line of interpretation whose protagonists were Giovanni Gentile and Benedetto Croce. Within this historiography, much of it narrowly conceived, there have from time to time been works both accurate and solid, such as F. Amerio, *Introduzione allo studio di G.B. Vico* (Turin, 1947). Much more acceptable, and in some cases valuable, have been several critical interventions from the Catholic camp (e.g. those of Francesco Botturi), intended to draw attention to the metaphysical-theological framework of Vichian thought, without undervaluing the importance of other more innovative, and even insidious, tendencies within it. *A propos* the religious and theological dimension of Vico's thought it is worth mentioning the two volumes of J. Millbank, *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico* (Lewiston, NY, 1991–2). Not a little indebted to these, among recent works of Catholic inspiration, was A. Sabetta, *I 'lumi' del Cristianesimo. Fonti teologiche nell'opera di Giambattista Vico* (The Vatican City, 2006), a work of serious exegetical purpose, but not of particularly significant critical insights. There is not space to provide an extended list of authors and works in this vein; the above should offer a sufficient indication of this line of Vichian interpretation.

interpretation, Vico was a markedly 'heterodox' thinker, influenced at crucial points of his thought by the most insidious tendencies in modern thought, and induced to hide his convictions for prudential reasons. Followed particularly in the English-speaking world, this line of interpretation, as is well-known, has recently received decisive and vigorously-argued expression in the two imposing volumes in which Jonathan Israel explores the presence and incidence of 'radical Enlightenment' in European culture between 1650 and 1750—a work of great importance even for those disinclined to accept its general orientation and its varied applications.² Yet for all that they are opposed, these two poles of interpretation share a 'unitary' evaluation of the Vichian intellectual experience, in which the 'objective' face of the work corresponds wholly with the 'subjective' convictions of the author in the matter of religion.

Another important (and indeed much larger) set of interpretations has instead distinguished these two levels, separating and splitting them off in an approach which can thus be defined as 'dualistic'. The clearest and most influential example of this interpretation is that offered by exponents of the speculative and neo-Idealist Italian tradition, especially Gentile and Croce. The intrinsic contradiction between Vico's sincere religious beliefs (to Gentile he was 'the most religious philosopher Italy had known') and his tendency to an immanentist vision of history would explain the elements of inconsistency and even of confusion within the systematic order of his 'New Science'. In this way, the opposition between the 'believer' and the 'philosopher' ran through the whole of Croce's book on Vico.³ To this hermeneutic tendency belong many critical reconstructions of Vico's thought, most notable among them those of Badaloni and of the Italian scholars who to a greater or lesser extent have followed his lead.⁴

² Even in the second volume of his 'trypitch' Israel has shown no hesitation in adjudging the most important of Vico's views in matters of religion—in *primis* the conception of providence—as 'quintessentially Spinozist', ill-hidden under a transparently prudential veil, sometimes associated with a 'deliberately negligent demonstration of Christian and papal claims', and, together with those of Doria, 'far from holding a genuinely Catholic position': J. I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested. Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (Oxford, 2006), 528–9, 532.

³ Although subsequently Croce cast strong doubt on this perspective, on the grounds that it dismissed 'the hypothesis of any deliberate and methodical dissimulation' of a prudential type: *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico* (Bari, 1911, sixth ed., 1980), 277.

⁴ In Italian historiography Nicola Badaloni remains the most authoritative exponent of an interpretation of Vico in a 'heterodox' key. See his classic (but difficult) work, *Introduzione a G.B. Vico* (Milan, 1961). In his last work on Vico he strengthens 'the suspicions of insufficient orthodoxy' formed on his account: N. Badaloni, *Laici credenti all'alba del moderno. La linea Herbert-Vico* (Florence, 2005), p. 1. Even so, the fact that his interpretation

III

The interpretations which bear on the questions at issue may thus be reduced to two principal pairs of polarities: on the one hand, 'orthodox' and 'heterodox', on the other 'unitary' or 'dualist'. These polarities may then be variously related to the pair 'modern' and 'anti-modern'. My own critical reconstruction of Vico's thought is set off against these. It affirms both the unitary and the 'orthodox' character of Vico's thought, while at the same time underlining its extraordinary and far from innocuous qualities of conceptual innovation. The ensemble of these characteristics can be evaluated in a variety of ways: in relation to the specific problems Vico addressed, to the theoretical levels of his work, to the discursive contexts in which he wrote, and also with reference to the 'materials' required for the construction of a system of thought embracing the entirety of human historical experience.

On Vico's choice of problems to address, the point to hold firmly in mind is the prior and emphatic 'politico-practical' inspiration of a meditation which had in this respect several 'pre-Enlightenment' accents. The indubitable orientation of his philosophy towards the human-civil world was emblematically expressed in the celebrated 'degnità' V of the *New Science* of 1744, according to which philosophy should 'giovar al genere umano' ('be useful to the human race').⁵ It is true that reflections of a distinctly

as a whole does not necessarily deny the personal religiosity of Vico, or his status as a 'believer', suggests that Badaloni's interpretation should be numbered among those which separate the 'objective' and 'subjective' levels of the problem of religion in Vico. The same may be said of the reading by a scholar close to Badaloni, Paolo Cristofolini, who, without denying the personal religiosity of Vico, has defined him as a 'pagan and barbarous' thinker: *Vico pagano e barbaro* (Pisa, 2001). By contrast a 'heterodox-prudential' interpretation of the work of the Neapolitan will be advanced by Gustavo Costa, who has in hand an extended study on the topic of 'Vico and the Inquisition'.

For the 'English-speaking' line of interpretation, one should mention—before the above-cited works of Israel, those of Frederick Vaughan, James Morrison, Gino Bedani. But the Anglophone reader may be referred to the synthetic but sufficiently complete 'Bibliographical Note' which concludes the work of M. Lilla, *The Making of an Anti-Modern* (Cambridge, Mass. & London, 1994), 237–49, esp. 243–5.

⁵ G. Vico, *Principj di Scienza Nuova d'intorno alla commune natura delle nazioni...* (1744), cited henceforth as *SN44*, in the edition of G. Vico, *Opere*, ed. A. Battistini, (Milan, 1990), § 129, and in the translation, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, by T. G. Bergin & M. H. Fisch, revised ed. (Ithaca and London, 1984), p. 61. For the characterisation of Vico's philosophy as essentially 'practical', see several of my works, in particular: 'Vico e l' "Aristotele pratico": la meditazione sulle forme "civili" nelle "pratiche" della *Scienza nuova prima*', *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani*, xiv–xv (1984–85), 63–129; and *Tra religione e prudenza. La "filosofia pratica" di Giambattista Vico* (Rome, 2007).

gnoseological character, and a related attempt to construct a systematic discourse on a metaphysical-physical-cosmological foundation, loom large at certain points in the intellectual odyssey of Vico, notably at the time of writing *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia* (*On the most ancient wisdom of the Italians*) (1710). Nevertheless, such interests remain subordinate to the pre-eminently 'practical' inspiration of the Neapolitan thinker, which is recognisable even in the *De uno* (1720) and is energetically affirmed in the other texts which make up the *Diritto universale* (1721–22).

At the same time, Vico's practical inspiration did not exclude a metaphysics. The metaphysical theme of the *conatus* which ran through the core of the *De antiquissima* continued to be present throughout Vico's endeavour to construct a philosophy 'without nature' (in the formula of an important essay by Pietro Piovani).⁶ For the attempt to do without physical nature could not be made without a founding 'metaphysical nature'. In due course, in the *New Science* (1725, 1730, 1744), this theme became concentrated and enclosed within the account—at once metaphysical and anthropological-historical—of the conative (and 'social') structure of the human 'mind': ready to re-emerge, as a powerful, never extinguished 'vis veri', from the feral bodies of the wandering 'beast-men' after the loss of divine truth, and of the cult of true religion.

But if it is conceded that the metaphysical idea of the *conatus* as the principle of the conservation of the universe remained significant even after the *De antiquissima*, at least beneath the surface (for the term is never used in the *New Science* of 1725), it should also be recognised that this understanding of *conatus* is fully compatible with the orthodox conception of a God who, *de potestate ordinata*, entrusted what he had created to a stable series of (secondary) causes. For the *conatus* of concern to Vico is essentially human, and completely distinct from the *conatus* (if the term must be used) of physical bodies. The human *conatus* has the peculiar nature of being a 'vis' tied to a principle of 'liberty', of belonging to 'the human will, to hold in check the motions impressed on the mind by the body'.⁷ By contrast it is substantially improper to speak of *conatus* in physical bodies, which move themselves insensibly, by necessity.⁸

⁶ Pietro Piovani, 'Vico e la filosofia senza natura', in P. Piovani, *La filosofia nuova di Vico*, ed. F. Tessitore (Naples, 1990).

⁷ *SN44*, § 340; *New Science*, p. 101.

⁸ On the *conatus* of physical bodies, *ibid.*, §§ 340, 689, pp. 101, 261.

In sum there is not in Vico (as there is in Spinoza, or in Hobbes)⁹ a single 'conative' logic of an impersonal and immanent principle of self-preservation, unifying human and natural. If there is something which offended Vico more than anything else, it was the idea, which he obsessively refuted, of the uniformity of the human and the natural. In this way the Vichian vision of 'nature' was marked by an entirely Christian, and even more Catholic, sense of its difference from 'culture'—from human, religious institutions (burial, marriage, divine worship) which, according to the universal practices of 'common sense', had put an end to the repugnant primordial mixing of nature and humanity. (More than most, Vico would raise humanity above its initial corporality, even this it could never be shed entirely.)¹⁰ Instead of an immanent logic of self-conservation, there had instead been an irrevocable decision on the part of God to entrust the creation to a stable system of secondary causes: those relative to physical bodies according to a regime of pure necessity; and those relative to the world of nations following a regime which provided for the human *conatus*, for 'the liberty of the human will', but which was, in relation to the attainment of a just humanity, 'blind' in its intentions for a large measure of time and for the largest part of humanity, even in 'human times'.

It is in this 'metaphysical-historical' framework that we should understand Vico's almost exclusive interest in religion as 'civil religion'. In fact a profound concern with religion stands at the centre of Vico's thinking, but it is not with a religion of interiority and of salvation, and there is no evocation of an 'amor patriae coelestis'. Instead the Vichian meditation on religion concerns its civil salvific function, which is obviously not restricted—as it was in 'Machiavellian' teaching—to the political sphere, but is the more profoundly civil because humanising. Such a function belongs—at least during the long period in which nations are only beginning their paths towards humanity—to any religion whatever, even the most barbarously superstitious: whence the great problems which Vico found himself facing when he had to examine the character and functions of the 'true religion' in the times of 'renewed barbarism' and of 'humanity'.¹¹

⁹ On which see Susan James, *Passion and Action. The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford, 1997), 126–56.

¹⁰ See above all my essay, 'Tra il corpo "sformato" e l'universale "informe". L' "indiffinita" forma della mente umana in Vico', in S. Ciurla and others (eds.), *Filosofia e storiografia. Studi in onore di Giovanni Papuli, Il L'età moderna* (Galatina, 2008), 263–77.

¹¹ I have discussed this historiographic theme above all in my essay 'La filosofia pratica di Vico tra religione e prudenza', in *Tra religione e prudenza*, 211–31.

This type of interest in religion has, not surprisingly, nourished the exegeses of those who wish to underline the non-Christian, or barely Christian, character of Vico's work. But we need to appreciate Vico's purposes. Even if he did not meet all the demands of an 'apologia' for contemporary Christian culture, he was responding to the most urgent by undertaking to defend that culture against two sets of voices in particular. First, against those who continued to recognise the social functions of religion, but did so by recasting them in the cold Machiavellian terms of imposture, of reason of state; second, and above all, against those who upheld (with Bayle, to Vico the greatest enemy of all) the lethal possibility of a society made up of 'virtuous atheists' alone.¹²

On this Vico was absolutely clear. Having rejected the impious pretension to 'demonstrate' the divine through the natural world, he re-assumed at the level of the 'civil world of nations' the task of defending Christianity which had once been Augustine's, but now with quite 'other principles', drawn from the rigorous discourse of the *New Science*. 'Thence are derived other (new) principles to demonstrate the argument of Saint Augustine in *De virtute romanorum* . . .'.¹³ These other principles were geared to unmasking (in the manner of the most lucid of seventeenth-century Augustinian meditations on moral philosophy) the action, as insidious as it was secret, of a 'supreme private interest' as the effective motive of the supposedly highest 'Roman virtue', and indeed of the 'heroism of the earliest peoples' in general. Above all, Vico's new principles enabled him to demonstrate how, on the basis of the eternal 'ordini' of a divine providence working spontaneously through the same human interests and passions, fallen humanity had raised itself up anew, and all the nations had taken the road towards the truth of justice, putting their trust in at least the minimal requirements of salvation.

¹² See my essay 'Attorno a Vico e Bayle', in my collection *Tra ordine della storia e storicità. Saggi sui saperi della storia in Vico* (Rome, 2001), 165–239. On Vico and reason of state, Machiavellianism, etc. see my 'Vico e la ragion di stato', in G. Borrelli (ed.), *Prudenza civile, bene comune, Guerra giusta. Percorsi della ragion di stato tra Seicento e Settecento* (Naples, 1999), 313–48, and 'Tra "frode" e autoinganno. Aspetti e figure del machiavellismo e dell'antimachiavellismo nella cultura napoletana ai tempi di Vico', in G. G. Borrelli (ed.), *Machiavelli e la cultura politica del meridione d'Italia*, (Naples, 2001), 87–127; also 'Vico, Tacito, il tacitismo', in S. Suppa (ed.), *Tacito e tacitismi in Italia da Machiavelli a Vico*, (Napoli, 2003), 149–99.

¹³ *SN44*, § 38, *New Science*, p. 24. But see also the version of 1730, which can now be read in the critical edition by P. Cristofolini: G. Vico, *La scienza nuova 1730*, (Napoli, 2004), p. 53. Hereafter *SN30EC*.

I will return, briefly, at a later stage, to what is extraordinary, modern and audaciously theoretical in the crucial Vichian achievement of a 'demonstrative' science of the universal and the necessary in the field of historical phenomena, a science founded epistemically on the ultimate pre-eminence of acute 'philosophical proofs', on the 'habit of reasoning geometrically', and thus able to put behind it all attempts to comprehend archaic times by conjectural means alone.¹⁴ What can be said about the thought of Vico in the field of religion is that it combined the maximum possible 'modern' theoretical apparatus compatible with the fundamental choice to defend a nucleus of 'orthodox', Christian, Catholic positions. This apparatus was based on a relatively ample documentation, which drew on an extensive series of discourses relating to the entire sphere of human activity, and was connected more or less closely with a number of advanced 'ideological' positions and proposals.

In this perspective, it is possible for the interpreter to distinguish a double, but non-contradictory, movement in Vichian reflection on the matter of religion. On one side, Vico was substantially orthodox in several respects: in his rejection of the new methods of Biblical hermeneutics; in his re-affirmation of the pillars of Christian orthodoxy, the absolute truth of sacred history and of its traditional chronology; in drawing the correlative distinction between the 'metaphysical history' of man, 'sacred history', and the 'history of the Gentiles'; in his consequent separation (though it was not absolute) of 'profane history' from the 'metaphysical history' of man;¹⁵ and finally in the preoccupation, of distinctively Catholic origin, with containing the free exercise of conscience, and, linked with it, his limited propensity to tolerance. On the other, not-so-obviously orthodox side of his thinking there are, first of all, his explicit abandonment of the traditional proofs of God, in favour of a novel 'civil' demonstration of the divine presence; his treatment of history in which its providential structure is invested in the spontaneity of ordinary ways; and, following from these, his substantial exclusion of divine miracles, the complete setting aside of Christ, etc.

¹⁴ *SN30EC*, p. 58.

¹⁵ I have underlined in several of my studies the historiographical requirement not to forget the priority (metaphysical, logical, chronological) of the 'metaphysical history' of man, and hence the unsustainability of an 'omni-hermeneutic' reading of Vico's thought. On the theme of the separation of sacred and profane history, the essay 'L'umanità di Vico tra le selve e le città. Agli inizi della storia della civiltà nel *Diritto universale*', in *Tra ordine della storia e storicità*, 109–64, also emphasises the inherent dangers of a comparativist approach.

In the construction of this systematic edifice for the defence of the ultimate grounds of orthodoxy, Vico employed 'materials' which derived from his 'adversaries' as well as from his 'friends'. 'Adversaries' included traditions of materialist, naturalist and utility-based thought associated with tendencies regarded as radical, modern, 'libertine', and 'pre-Enlightenment'. An important example can be found in Epicurean, Lucretian ideas concerning the rude origins and material causes of the development of human social groups.¹⁶ 'Friendly' sources were those deriving from Christian and in particular Catholic traditions: as, for example, the theory, well-established by the Scholastics, of the 'potentia ordinata', of the divine will operating providentially by natural means; or the Jansenist tradition of reflection (linked at its base to the preceding theory) on the social productivity of the passions. The latter is the line of thinking which runs from Nicole and Malebranche to Mandeville and Smith, and it is crucial to the anthropological and historical reflection of Vico, where it takes a form unconnected with any 'radical' Enlightenment, but nonetheless of decisive importance in constructing a 'modern language' of enquiry in the eighteenth century. In this essay, however, I propose to focus at greater length on the essential ingredient of Vico's conception of the divine, the idea of 'potestas ordinaria'. This will be the subject of the following section.

IV

Interpretations of the Vichian conception of providence along heterodox, naturalistic or even Spinozist lines place great weight on the way in which the divine plan directs the course of history through the ordinary course of affairs, according to secondary causes, without direct intervention by the divine will, without miracles, and without the presence of Christ. In this way providence seems to become nothing more than the 'natural structure' of the historical process. But this is to draw an erroneous conclusion from a false premise: to maintain that for Vico's position to have remained within the orthodox Christian camp, he should have followed the worn-out, innocuous path (*à la Bossuet*) of identifying the operation of providence in 'the course of nations' (in truth, of the gentile nations) with the direct and more or less constant intervention of God. This was a path

¹⁶ Also on these, there are lucid pages in John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment. Scotland and Naples 1680–1760*, (Cambridge, 2005).

which did not interest Vico at all, and which would have been useless to the Christian cause he had taken up. Instead the path he did pursue had theological premises whose orthodoxy can be vindicated.

For what has been underestimated, even ignored, in the enormous literature on the Vichian conception of providence is that the idea of its operation through the ordinary course of secondary causes, 'rebus ipsis dictantibus', is one of the most important—and most 'orthodox'—of the conclusions to have been drawn from a centuries-long series of discussions over the attributes of the Christian God, and in particular over the vexed question of the relations between his *potestas absoluta* and his *potestas ordinata*. Following an Augustinian formulation repeated by many authors (e.g. Campanella) and again by Vico, the attributes of the omnipotent Christian God are in the first place *nosse, posse, velle* (literally, to know, to be able, to will), and thus *scientia, voluntas*, and, precisely, *potestas* (wisdom, will, and power). As is well known, following essential 'antecedents' (in the thought, above all, of Augustine, Boethius and others), discussion and indeed bitter controversy over these divine attributes took place particularly in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but continued thereafter. The debate was further nourished by the opposition between Catholic and Protestant conceptions of the divinity, the latter unsurprisingly marked by an inclination to privilege the voluntarist element among the divine attributes. The issues thus received renewed and peculiar expression in the late sixteenth century, in the second Scholastic; and they exercised an extensive influence on philosophical debate in the fields of metaphysics, physics, gnoseology and ethics. Among authors whom Vico chose as his principal interlocutors, it should be sufficient to refer to Galileo's account of the qualities of simplicity and legibility impressed on nature by God, to Descartes' proofs of God and of eternal truths, and to Malebranche on the attributes of the divine.

It was, more or less, in the third decade of the thirteenth century that the ideas of the *potestas absoluta Dei*, that is, of God's unlimited liberty to manifest his omnipotence, and of the *potentia ordinata Dei*, the divine power established and exercised according to an eternal plan, were joined together to form one complex of problems and principles. There is no need to follow the subsequent debate in detail: it is sufficient for the ensuing interpretation of Vico to delineate its two fundamental directions. One, which can be traced back to Duns Scotus, privileged the predominance of the *potestas absoluta*. The other, to which can be assimilated Aquinas and Ockham, privileged the *potestas ordinata*. On the latter view, a restraint had been wisely and benevolently placed on the exercise of a *potestas*

absoluta which might otherwise seem riskily capricious; in this way God's omnipotence remained *de jure* untouched, but was 'self-inhibited' precisely by his attributes of *sapientia* and *bonitas*.

The tendency to which it is legitimate to enlist from the beginning both Aquinas and Ockham evidently ascribed to the *potestas absoluta* sovereign dominion *de jure* over all the *possibilia*, and only *de facto* restricted its exercise to the determination of a more limited range of possibilities. Given that it depended on divine wisdom and benevolence, the exercise of the *potestas ordinata* was logically successive to that of the *potestas absoluta*. Not only were the possibilities subject to the *potestas ordinata* as bound by the principles of non-contradiction as those emanating from the *potestas absoluta*; but they were the optimum possibilities within the comprehensively designed whole, and therefore a benevolently wise God could not but choose them and maintain them immutably. The *potestas ordinata* thus ensured the prospect of an eternal order which endowed the universe with stability and established secure foundations for the knowledge and actions of men. In this sense, according to Aquinas, 'Deus potuit, sed noluit' (God could have, but did not choose to).

On the opposite side, the tendency whose most eminent representative was Scotus drew on clear voluntarist premises to ascribe to the *potestas absoluta* a priority not only logical but also factual, one which subsists even after God had determined the order of creation. Those who followed this tendency had an image of God as an absolute sovereign, whose will, or action, cannot be inhibited by anything (apart from the restriction entailed by the principle of non-contradiction). To the words of Paul—'omnis potestas a Deo est'—they gave the radical reading that God's is a *potestas* which cannot be bound by the physical or historical order which it has created. Thus while Ockham reserved the *potestas absoluta* for the ensemble of possibilities *de jure*, that is all possibilities which are not contradictory, and the *potestas ordinata* for the ensemble of possibilities *de facto*, that is all contingent possibilities, past, present and future, Scotus 'aligned *potentia absoluta* with the *de facto*, *potentia ordinata* with the *de jure*'.¹⁷

¹⁷ On which the excellent work of E. Randi, *Il sovrano e l'orologio. Due immagini di Dio nel dibattito sulla «potentia absoluta» fra XIII^e XIV secolo*, (Firenze, 1987), quotation on p. 59. See also the ambitious and brilliant study by Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, 1986), which explores the issues of the attributes of God, and hence the *potestas absoluta* and *ordinata*, and also includes a discussion of Vico. Strangely, however, Funkenstein does

Thus separated and reconstructed by historical enquiry, the two tendencies may seem clear enough. In fact, of course, the separate tendencies were intertwined, mutually 'contaminated', in an extended series of theological positions. Even so, the two tendencies are recognisable in successive theological, philosophical, ethical and political controversies. It is also clear that the most influential, even victorious position, especially in Catholic thinking, was that which emphasised the *potestas ordinata*, the better to contain, even if it could never entirely eliminate, the idea of a constitutive instability in the ordinary course of affairs, an instability which left the world always open to the irruption of the extraordinary, and put at risk its very 'legibility'.

In dealing with the extraordinary, the miraculous, two options were available to Thomists and/or Ockhamists. On one side, and particularly for the Ockhamist, there was the possibility of conjoining the idea of an ordained order of creation with a strong distinction between the sphere of the natural course of secondary causes and the sphere of grace. On the other, precisely because it privileged the constancy of divine will and action, the tradition which confined the absolute power of divine intervention in the world purely to the sphere of *de jure* possibility tended to insert miracles into the order instituted *de potentia ordinata*, and thus to render the possibility of their occurrence in a certain measure explicable.

In this way, the line of thought which emphasised the *potestas ordinata* carried with it a tendency to dispense with the extraordinary, and to associate itself (in a manner whose orthodoxy was defended by Galileo) with the claim of modern science that the world was transparently legible on the theological assumption of a wise and benevolent God, ordering it according to a stable set of secondary causes. It also carried with it a tendency to revealing terminological variation—from *potestas absoluta* to *potentia extraordinaria*, and from *potestas ordinata* to *potentia ordinaria*—which was widely diffused by the time of Vico, but which was already current in the era of a great protagonist of the Second Scholastic (assiduously studied by Vico), Francisco Suárez, in the pages of his *Disputationes metaphysicae* (especially XXX.xvii).¹⁸ The question of the *potestas divina* was indeed fully discussed within the complex spectrum of the Second

not connect the two, and makes no attempt to explain the theological premises of the 'simplicity' which he attributes to the action of Vico's 'laicised providence'.

¹⁸ On which, G. van den Brink, *Almighty God. A Study of the Doctrine of Divine Omnipotence*, (Kampen, 1993), esp. 76–77 (with reference to Suárez).

Scholastic, in a variety of positions most of which are to be found in the pages of Suárez' *Disputationes*.¹⁹

Turning to Vico, it can be seen that his thinking about the divine is profoundly shaped by addressing a similar set of issues concerning the divine attributes. There are in his works several precise references which help to clarify his conception of a benignly wise God who chooses to act providentially through the eternal, ordinary course of human affairs. Before we turn to these, however, we should recall that Vico could hardly fail to be aware of the issues involved, since they were central to his earliest studies. To go no further than what can be learned from his *Autobiography*, these studies had soon brought him into contact with 'Father Giuseppe Ricci, another Jesuit, a man of penetrating intelligence, a Scotist, but at bottom a follower of Zeno'. Thence he had been led, by personal choice, to shut himself up 'at home for a year, to study Suárez', or at least his *Metaphysics*; and from there he had begun 'to study dogma', through which 'he found himself at the heart of doctrine concerning grace, particularly through reading Ricardo, the Sorbonne theologian'.²⁰ We should further recall that the most recent discussions of the divine attributes encountered by Vico, those of Descartes and Malebranche, were themselves addressed to this debate, and owed specific debts to Suárez.

For Vico also encountered the general principle of the simplicity and immutability of the divine order in these, his most frequent modern interlocutors.²¹ Even a minimally adequate treatment of the affinities and divergences between Descartes, Malebranche and Vico, and of Vico's debts

¹⁹ On the positions of Suárez and his Jesuit co-religionist Molina, see W. L. Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez*, (Leiden, 1988), chs. vii and viii; and *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom. The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience*, (Leiden, 1991), 239. Then see M. Álvarez, 'La omnipotencia de Dios y el principio de contradicción en Francisco Suárez', in G. Canziani, M. A. Granada, Y. C. Zarka (eds), *Potentia Dei. L'onnipotenza divina nel pensiero dei secoli XVI^e XVII^e*, (Milan, 2000), 173–93; and, in the same volume, the contribution of a scholar who has already published significant work on the Second Scholastic, D. Ferraro, 'Il dibattito sulla "potentia Dei" nella seconda scolastica', 157–72.

²⁰ G. B. Vico, *Vita*, in *Opere*, pp. 6–8, 12; *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, translated by M. H. Fisch & T. G. Bergin (Ithaca, 1944), 114, 119. Vico's comment that no Scholastic philosophy more closely approached the Platonic philosophy than the Scotist merits further investigation, despite my own conviction that in considering the attributes of God Vico tended in the direction opposite to the Scotist position. On Vico, Scotus and Suárez, see Sabetta, *I 'lumi' del Cristianesimo. Fonte teologiche nell'opera di Vico*, 185–202, and also P. B. O' Farrell, 'Suárez y Vico. Veinte años después', in *Cuadernos sobre Vico*, 7–8 (1997), 239–52.

²¹ To Vico and Malebranche should be added Arnauld, but he must be omitted for the moment.

to them, is impossible here. It would require as a preliminary: a review of the works by them which were available to Vico; recognition of the non-linear course of both Descartes' and Malebranche's thinking about matter; and an awareness of the various scholarly interpretations of that thinking. Nevertheless, it is my opinion that the image of God elaborated by Vico reveals substantial affinities with the 'anti-voluntaristic' image of Malebranche, especially in the *Illustrationes* which accompanied the *De inquirenda veritate* (*De la Recherche de la vérité*—but almost certainly read by Vico in the Latin). Vico's thought moved within the Augustinian-Malebranchiste framework of man's participation in an order of truth co-essential with God himself (coinciding with his 'aeterna ratio'). Within this framework, it is the divine attributes of 'sapientia' and 'bonitas' which are pre-eminent in Vico, binding God's will.²²

Turning to Vico's texts, it can be seen that the theme of the divine attributes runs through the entire Vichian corpus, with a notable consistency in its emphases, even when the subjects under discussion are quite different. It is true that the Neapolitan thinker never engages in a systematic, analytical discussion of the theological problem, and that he never undertakes a demonstration of the divine attributes in their interrelations, or in terms of the divine as a constant good will. Nevertheless, Vico effectively set himself the task of demonstrating this conception of the divine, having first asserted it on various occasions, through an enquiry into the providential order which rules the world of nations.

In the early *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia* (1710) Vico was committed to demonstrating that the knowledge of God is possible by means of the argument (which he understands as completing and correcting the thought of Malebranche, though in fact it is substantially the same) that 'nullam corporis ideam agnosco: id igitur quod in me cogitat, est purissima mens, nempe Deus'.²³ For the attributes of God, however, he proceeded on the basis of no more than a simple declaration that the divine 'voluntas' combines the qualities of goodness, steadfastness, ineluctability and constancy. '*Certo scimus Deum omnipotentem, omniscitum, optimum; cujus*

²² Absent from Vico's thought, however, is the divine attribute most emphasised by Malebranche, God's love for his own glory; Malebranche placed a correspondingly lesser emphasis on God's goodness.

²³ G. Vico, *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia*, VI, ed. M. Sanna (Rome, 2005), 108, translated as 'On the ancient wisdom of the Italians taken from the origins of the Latin Language', in L. Pompa (ed.), *Vico: Selected Writings* (Cambridge, 1982), 66: 'something thinks in me, therefore something is. But in my thinking I discern no idea of body; therefore, what thinks in me is unadulterated mind, that is, God'.

intelligere, verum; cujus *velle, bonum*; cujus intelligere simplicissimum, & praesentissimum; cujus *velle defixum & ineluctabile*'.²⁴ If it was entirely natural that Vico, responding to a common orthodoxy, recognised at the outset the attribute of 'divina bonitas' in God, working with absolute 'celeritate & facilitate', together with the divine 'faciendi facilitas',²⁵ it is still important to recognise that it is the quality of benevolence which 'induces' divine omnipotence to promote a simple, stable order in the world. As early as the *De antiquissima*, therefore, one can find the idea of a divine agent who, while possessing the faculty of dominium of an absolute 'Princeps', nevertheless exceeds our expectations by operating through a stable system of causes ('ex certis causis')—even if at this point Vico still saw the 'Dei voluntas' as committed more extensively to assuring the 'salus' of the 'Mundus' in general, and thus to the 'conservationi universi'.²⁶

Ten years later, the *De Uno* (1720) reveals a marked discontinuity with the *De antiquissima* in the problems it addresses, a discontinuity only confirmed when the other two volumes of the *Diritto universale* (including the *De Constantia*) were published in 1721 and 1722. The change is revealed in the move (in many respects a return) to a human-metaphysical discourse; in the substitution of the *verum-factum* by the *verum-certum*; and in the re-modulation of the *conatus* into the human key of the 'vis veri'. Even so this work too satisfied the requirement at least to outline a systematic treatment of the 'natura' of God and his attributes: 'Posse, Nosse, Velle infinitum', according to the definition given by Augustine in the *Confessions*.²⁷ The conclusion substantially confirms and even accentuates the indication of a divine 'velle' which is not absolute or arbitrary, but in as much as it is 'optimum', is directed by *scientia*, or *sapientia-bonitas*. It is especially in chapters IV–VI that Vico's choice of the God of *potestas ordinata* is clearest. Here we find the God in which the attribute of *voluntas* is no sooner recognised as absolute ('quantum vult, tantum potest'), than it is promptly bound by being connected with his being 'perfectissimum'. The divine 'omnipotentia' cannot but be in the same instant 'nosse veracis-

²⁴ *De antiquissima*, VI, ed. Sanna, 109, 11; transl. in *Selected Writings*, 67: 'We know with certainty that God is omnipotent, omniscient and perfect, and that his understanding is true, his will good, his understanding absolute and immediate, his will fixed and ineluctable' (italics added).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII.i, 136–8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, VIII.iii, 140.

²⁷ *De uno universi iuris principio et fine uno* (henceforth *De uno*), II, in G. Vico, *Opere giuridiche*, ed. P. Cristofolini, (Florence, 1974), 43.

simum', 'sapientia infinita'; its 'velle', in as much as it is 'optimum', cannot but be 'summa bonitas'. This is the essential, decisively anti-voluntarist theological foundation on which divine providence is conceived as acting only 'per simplicissimas vias' ('by the simplest ways'), in contradistinction to the conceptual tradition which would have the divine *potestas absoluta* persistently interrupting or reformulating the order of contingent things, and thus making it impossible to secure a basis for human understanding.²⁸

Discussions of the divine and the divine order among even the most acute of recent interpreters of the *De uno* suggest that it is a mistake to assume (as some commentators do) that the attributes of God were in 'equilibrium'. Certainly, according to the whole Christian tradition, there could not but be a relation of implication between them. 'Intelleximus Deum esse Posse, Nosse, Velle infinitum, et quod ea tria unum sunt, verum esse' reaffirms Vico in the second part of the *Diritto universale*, the *De Constantia*.²⁹ If this mutual 'implication' of the divine attributes was recognised by the philosopher, however, it seems credible to suppose the pre-eminence among them of the 'nosse', of 'sapientia', by which 'ratio' prevents the 'omnipotentia' of the 'velle' from altering the stability of the eternal 'ordo'. In this connection, moreover, we should remember the arguments of Vico concerning the 'simplicissimae viae' used by the divine 'summa sapientia' to rule all things (including the pursuit of 'ordo' in the sphere of created human beings). The ways which are characterised as 'facillimae' correspond to a principle of 'simplicitas', and in the order of history present themselves as 'opportunitates', 'occasiones', 'casus': they point to the solution of understanding divine providence as the exercise of a 'potestas ordinata' which already, in the *De uno*, begins to work 'rebus ipsis', 'moribus ipsis'.³⁰ This underlines an important implication of the pre-eminence of wisdom and goodness among the divine attributes: these bind the exercise of that perfection, first of all in the natural order, to the maximum of simplicity and facility of form. In turn, this renders the exercise of divine perfection conformable with the premises and findings of modern science. It is such an understanding of divine order in the physical world which provides the theological-ontological premises of Galileo's conception of nature. God 'relishes simplicity and ease of operation', Galileo had affirmed in the *Dialogue of Two Great World Systems*—risking the

²⁸ Ibid., II–IV, 43, 45.

²⁹ *De Constantia iurisprudensis* (1721), I, II, in *Opere giuridiche*, 355. 'We understand God to be Power, Wisdom and Will, and because these three are one, to be Truth.'

³⁰ Vico, *De uno*, CLVI, 211.

weighty objections to which Pope Urban VIII had given voice.³¹ Vico can justly be considered Galileo's heir in this respect, in that he transferred the principle of simplicity onto the plane of history.

It is also in *De Uno* and *De constantia* that Vico's relations with Descartes and Malebranche should be explored. Vico explicitly sets out the different perspectives of Descartes, Arnauld and Malebranche on man's access to God in *De constantia*.³² The convergence of his view with those of Descartes and Malebranche on the absolute simplicity of the immutable order of the real is clear. But Vico is also careful not to allow his argument to be coloured by the 'voluntarist' aspects of Descartes' accounts of the Divine will. When Vico affirms in *De Uno* that 'Deus, summa libertate qua fruitur, suae aeternae rationi immutabiliter haeret'³³ ('God, with the complete liberty he enjoys, nevertheless adheres immutably to his eternal reason'), he presents divine immutability neither in the terms of the 'first Descartes' (for whom the immutability of the divine will comes 'afterwards', to guarantee the divine decree of the true), nor in those of the 'second Descartes' (for whom the immutability of the true belongs already to the decree which institutes it, and then is ultimately assured by the veracity of God, who will not wish to change the established order of truth).³⁴ Instead, *De uno* contains the highly eloquent affirmation that 'bonitas' is the attribute which accompanies 'potentia' and 'sapientia' in God's creative relation with man, thus ensuring that God's 'velle' is inexorable from his 'bonitas'.³⁵

If the *De uno* offered an unequivocally *a priori* foundation for Vico's discourse, this was already weakened in the *De Constantia*, where Vico outlined a truly global history of civilisation. Such a history was now based on a genetic approach to human phenomenology, governed by the 'implicative' principle of the *verum-certum*, and accompanied by an embryonic epistemology of the scientific demonstration of historical phenomena. This double *coupure* between the two works occurred, however,

³¹ Galileo, *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo*, in *Le opere di Galileo Galilei*, Edizione nazionale, under the direction of A. Favaro, (Firenze, 1929–38), VII, 566. The passage is cited in the excellent essay of L. Bianchi, 'Interventi divini, miracoli e ipotesi soprannaturali nel *Dialogo* di Galileo', in *Potentia Dei*, op. cit., 244.

³² Vico, *De constantia*, I.I.v [2], p. 367.

³³ Vico, *De uno*, CXIII, [2], p. 135.

³⁴ R. Descartes, *Quintae responsiones*, in *Oeuvres*, ed. C. Adam & P. Tannery (Paris, 1996), VII: *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, p. 380 (italics mine).

³⁵ Vico, *De uno*, LXXV, [2], p. 93: *Deus Optimus Maximus, infinita sua potential, sapientia et bonitate, creavit ad sui similitudinem hominem, et potentia dedit ei esse, sapientia nosse, bonitate velle.*

at relatively separated levels of enquiry, and does not mean that the wise and good God of the *De uno* was not the same God who in *De Constantia* comes to the aid of man with a spontaneously-operating providence, working through secondary causes.

Thus Vico emerges as one of the greatest, and certainly most fertile and radical heirs of the Christian tradition which characterised the divine nature in terms of its wisdom and goodness. His may be thought of as a conceptualisation of the divine closer to the Greek than to the Scotist—but only in so far as the lesser weight attached to the absolute divine will is compensated by the connotations of its goodness. There is no question of subordinating the divine order to an Aristotelian or Stoic idea of necessity, for its constancy is logically successive to divine omnipotence. God could have chosen another order, but chose (and could not but have chosen) a providential order, and one that was the simplest possible. It is for this reason that Vico repeatedly invokes the ‘divine goodness’ as the firmest of checks on the arbitrary agency of God: God’s wisdom and goodness were indispensable to Vico’s understanding of the ordinary operation of providence in human history.

Within the confines of this study, it is not possible to follow all the twists and turns of Vico’s treatment of this theme in the successive versions of the *New Science*, which appeared in 1725, 1730 and 1744. I shall limit myself to some examples. Thus, in the *First New Science*, Vico observes that in the logical succession of the divine attributes, it is the ‘divine goodness’ which is revealed as connoting the essence (and hence in a certain manner the ‘determination’) of divine ‘omnipotence’: ‘divine wisdom, the daughter of omnipotence, blessed with self-understanding, is led to love omnipotence through love of her divine bounty (goodness)’.³⁶ Further, it is by ‘the attribute of providence’ that all men are given, through their ‘common sense’, the ‘idea of God’: that is, ‘an eternal and infinite mind that penetrates and foresees everything...which, through her infinite bounty (goodness)...disposes the things that particular men or peoples order for their own particular ends...towards a universal end...through which, but *using these same particular ends as her means*, she preserves them.’ And it is precisely this aspect of an ‘ordering providence’

³⁶ G. Vico, *Principj di una scienza nuova intorno alla natura delle nazioni...* (1725, henceforth indicated as *SN25*), in *Opere*, §437, p. 1190; translated by Leon Pompa, *The First New Science* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 251. Pompa translates ‘bontà’ as ‘bounty’, where ‘goodness’ perhaps more directly captures the Scholastic definition.

(*provvedenza ordinatrice*) which, Vico declares, he will demonstrate throughout the whole of the *New Science*.³⁷

In the clear shape of a *potestas ordinata*, the providential God thus operates through a fixed regime of secondary causes. Vico moves within the tracks of a tradition of indubitable orthodoxy. This is the case even though problems of no small significance, and real dangers of heterodoxy, lurk on the terrain of the created world. It is important to be clear on this point of interpretation. My argument is directed towards showing the correctness of the theological foundations of Vico's position, in opposition to readings which tend to place him among the 'heterodox'. But it is not intended to imply that the complex of positions and theses advanced by Vico was other than marked by great risks. The order of human, historical creation is much less 'neutral' than that of physical nature. Even though he distinguished supernatural salvation, grace, from its natural counterpart, the preservation of the world of the nations, Vico refused to attribute the latter to conscious human action until after a long period of time, and he upheld the value of any form of access to the divine which was to be found or indeed still existed (among the most barbarous of contemporary nations) in the religious practices of pagan peoples. By implication, this clearly raised the questions if, how, and when Christianity had begun to 'collaborate' to a significant extent in the preservation of nations.

On this point, which still awaits full investigation, it is worth remarking that the subject of miracles, which is in substance absent from the *First New Science* of 1725, is treated in the later versions. It is raised in the third and final version of the *New Science* (that of 1744), in relation to a theme of which Vico never tires, the distinction between sacred and profane history. Thus in the *degnità* (i.e. proposition) number CV, he reiterates that 'the gentiles had only the *ordinary* helps of providence; the Hebrews also had *extraordinary* assistance from the true God'.³⁸ References to miraculous interventions deriving from the biblical tradition are present at several points in Vico's argument in the *New Science*, as in the example of the 'confusion of tongues', 'which took place in a miraculous manner, so that in an instant many different languages were formed'.³⁹ But of greater relevance is Vico's willingness to introduce, if only in the interstices of his argument, the intervention of the supernatural, in the form of the

³⁷ Ibid., § 45, p. 1008; *First New Science*, p. 39 (italics added).

³⁸ SN44, § 313; *The New Science*, p. 92 (translation adjusted, and italics added).

³⁹ SN44, §§ 62, 313; *New Science*, pp. 37, 92.

'ineffable decrees of grace', and thus of the miraculous, in the course of developments in profane history into which he will later insert the experience of Christianity. For while the history of Christianity is related to the sacred history of the Hebrews, Vico does not treat the history of Christianity as a simple continuation of a sacred history separate from profane history. Rather, Christianity occupies an uncertain position within the history of humanity as a whole, the history which began with the escape of the gentile nations from the condition of bestial wandering, and suffered a *ricorso*, a 'return', to a state of barbarism with the fall of the Roman empire. Thus he writes of a divine intervention 'working in superhuman ways', to the end that 'the truth of the Christian religion might be revealed and confirmed by opposing the virtue of the martyrs to the power of Rome, and the teaching of the Fathers, together with the miracles, to the vain wisdom of Greece'.⁴⁰ At the same time, Vico also presents this *ricorso* as one in which God 'permits' that the 'birth of a new order of humanity among the nations' would happen in such a way that 'according to the *natural* course of human institutions themselves', it (that is, true religion) might be '*firmly* established'.⁴¹ As I shall explain more fully in a moment, this perspective has precise and dangerous consequences for 'orthodoxy'.

In sum, we find Vico, at a particularly delicate point, once again reaffirming his principle that 'although this world has been created in time and in particular, yet the institutions established in it by providence are universal and eternal'.⁴² God, who from the very beginning of the text has been defined pre-eminently by 'the attribute of his providence',⁴³ is thus confirmed as a divine agent 'bound' by his 'immense goodness', who must use 'easy means', according to his 'infinite wisdom' (a phrase which also carries a possible echo of the '*scientia media*' of Suárez and Molina). This wisdom makes him a 'counsellor', who exercises his omnipotence as a 'minister' (a political reading of the idea of providence to which I intend to return in another study). In Vico's words,

Since divine providence has omnipotence as a *minister*, it must ordain its institutions *by means as easy* as the natural customs of men; since it has infinite wisdom as *counsellor*, whatever it disposes must, in entirety, be order; and since it has *for its end its own immeasurable goodness*,

⁴⁰ SN44, § 1047; *New Science*, p. 397.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, italics added.

⁴² SN44 § 342; *New Science*, p. 102.

⁴³ SN44 § 9; *New Science*, p. 7.

whatever it institutes (*ordina*) must be directed to a good always superior to that which men have proposed to themselves.⁴⁴

These pages from the section 'Of Method' in the third *New Science* might be selected for inclusion in an ideal anthology of the modern outcomes of the great debate on the attributes of God. In them the position of Vico stands out for the way in which he has, with quite extraordinary energy and originality, transposed the discussion onto the terrain of the 'world of the nations'. It stands out too, with equally original consequences, for having 'chosen' among the attributes of the divine which operate mediately in this world the 'goodness' of his 'will', along with the ultimately superior 'wisdom' which directs 'goodness' according to the simplest means of 'naturalness', in order to preserve the 'human race'. In the triad of terms which characterise the attributes of God, the adjectives which qualify his understanding and his will are respectively 'wise' (*saggia*) and 'beneficent' (*benigna*), precisely those which limit any voluntaristic conception of the divine.⁴⁵ Thus 'in the series of possibilities' (all the infinite *possibilia*, excluding the self-contradictory), the divine 'eternal wisdom' has dictated the choice of the only means by which the 'divine benefits' could arise. The divine 'proofs' therefore 'will give us the naturalness, the order and the end, which is the preservation of the human race'.⁴⁶ And 'by these divine proofs, ... we may reflect on the *simplicity* and *naturalness* with which providence ordered these institutions of men'.⁴⁷

Vico's thought thus resumed and reformulated on the plane of the 'historical world' a direction of theological thinking which had already been applied to vindicate the absolute legibility of the 'natural world'. Through adopting this account of providence, he was able to place the uncovering of the 'eternal chain of causes' on the epistemic foundation of a 'science' of historical phenomena, in a way completely at odds with the prevailing conjectural foundation of eighteenth-century historical knowledge. Vico's thinking was thus able to demonstrate a capacity for original, 'modern' insights, within an absolutely 'orthodox' choice of theological framework, whose priority the historian should not attempt to disguise.

⁴⁴ SN44 § 343; *New Science*, p. 102, italics added.

⁴⁵ SN44, § 345; *New Science*, p. 103: the historic 'eternal chain of causes' depends upon 'the omnipotent, wise and beneficent will of the best and greatest God'.

⁴⁶ SN44, §§ 344, 345; *New Science*, pp. 102–3.

⁴⁷ SN44, § 630 (referring back to the section on Method); *New Science*, p. 235 (italics added).

By contrast, on a series of other fronts which allowed him much greater autonomy, Vico could reach a series of wonderfully innovative conclusions. Here it is possible to offer only the briefest overview of these. On the ontological and gnoseological plane, there is the novelty of his drastic abandonment of any attempt at an 'internal' knowledge of the natural world, in favour of a wholly genetic knowledge, rendered in the form of a science, of the human world. At the epistemological level, there is what in various contributions I have identified as the most important, most fundamental 'discovery' of Vico: the possibility of a demonstrative (and not simply conjectural) 'science' of human affairs, which follows from the application to the historical world of the 'truths of reason', according to the logic of 'the impossibility that a certain historical phenomenon could be otherwise'.⁴⁸ Finally, at the anthropological level, there is the establishment of a genetic approach to human nature subversive of the entire western tradition of analysis of the human subject and his faculties. This Vico achieved by a wonderfully fertile re-evaluation of the 'facoltà ingegnose'—the 'ingenious faculties'—a re-evaluation which should not, however, be understood nostalgically, as elevating them to the same rank as the powers of reason, in line with the misapprehension of Vico's 'modernity' found in many interpretations.

Numerous too are the discursive contexts in which Vico's capacity for original intervention can be experienced. These range from the general design of a total history of civilisation to novel approaches in philosophical reflection on and historical reconstruction of myth, language, poetry, and the human faculties, on 'socio-economic', juridical and political forms, on customs, on art, and so on. All of this, moreover, is framed by an incredibly fertile re-evaluation of the earliest universal human condition, the 'barbaric' or 'poetic', from which every 'nation' has emerged (and which gives Vico's thought an openness to all forms of human culture which ranks among the most significant examples of European 'cosmopolitanism').⁴⁹ There is nothing here to justify us in characterising Vico's as a regressive, or 'anti-modern' conception of history, even if Vico consciously accentuated its 'dramatic' possibilities.

⁴⁸ Here I refer above all to my essay, 'La "critica di severa ragione" nella scienza della storia. Vico e l' "ermeneutica" dei tempi favolosi attorno al primo '700', in *Tra ordine della storia e storicità*, 84–89.

⁴⁹ See my 'Cittadini della storia. La "gran città del gener'umano" in Vico', in *Tra religione e prudenza*, 297–316.

As a demonstration that Vico's was not a nostalgic, anti-modern conception of history, and an instance of its dramatic possibilities, I will conclude this section by returning to his vision of the Christian 'middle ages' (our expression, not his). In the introduction and opening chapter of Book V of the *New Science*, Vico confirms his fundamental choice to read the history of the *ricorso*, the 'return to barbarism', in terms of the ordinary ways—of the 'natural course'—of 'human affairs'. It was a decision fraught with implications of heterodoxy for his vision of the 'Christian experience'. For not only had the Christians no right to their own, separate sacred history (such as the Hebrews had enjoyed, Vico continued to insist, because they had lived apart from their gentile neighbours). The Christian experience could not claim the right to characterise, or even to pretend to have influenced to any significant extent, the history of that European part of humanity to which the true religion had been made known. That the most markedly heterodox consequence of Vico's insistence on a systematic application of his model of the 'course and recourse of nations' may be found in his treatment of the most Christian middle ages is something which his interpreters have consistently underestimated. Not only was the pure character of the Christian religion obscured by his choice of perspective; what it underlined was the assimilation of that character into the 'enduring characteristics of human custom'. The Christian experience was thereby associated with the return of practices associated with the superstitious 'false religions' of the first barbarian times of fanciful credulity—'duels', 'heroic slavery' and so on. The result was a notably crude image of the 'Middle Ages', accompanied by a severe judgement on 'those unhappy centuries', 'those most barbarous times' of 'extreme ferocity and cruelty', which had seen a return to 'mute language', 'hieroglyphic writing', and the 'ancient practices of asylum'.⁵⁰ It was as if, for Vico, the events of Christian history had simply to be subordinated to the more important fact of the continuity of all human history. It is difficult to find, even in the High Enlightenment (even, perhaps, in Gibbon) a vision as severe, or at least as insidious, of the Christian Middle Ages. It was a vision only in part tempered by the properly Vichian recognition that within such barbarism were characteristics, albeit ones common to all the archaic barbarisms, of a certain magnanimous sociability, as well as of a productive ingenuity in the sphere of technical invention.

⁵⁰ *SN44* §§ 1046–1056; *New Science* pp. 397–400 (translation adjusted in some cases).

V

In relation to the heterodoxy of Paolo Mattia Doria, I can be much briefer. Doria's thought may be interpreted on various levels, which for simplicity may be distinguished as the philosophical, the religious and the political. At each level, scholars have reached very different conclusions. Several of Doria's positions on religion in particular have been judged 'heterodox', and as combining an up-to-date knowledge of the issues with an antiquated, anti-rational theoretical outlook which might be characterised as 'Platonic-Hermetic-Ficinian'. The interpretative perspective which I believe should be developed runs along the following lines.⁵¹

Above all, what must be registered is the absolute centrality of Doria's interest in the ethical-political sphere—in the *vita civile*, 'civil life'—and his firm preference for the classical 'virtues of the gentiles' (to which at the end of his life he would add, at least in part, the virtues of the Chinese). This interest was accompanied by an inclination—much stronger than in Vico—to intervene in the issues of the day, whether at the level of analysis and diagnosis, or with immediate, 'political' proposals. These interventions might take a 'reformist' or a 'utopian' guise, affirming positions more or less distant from the established arrangements of the time, whether economic and social, political or ecclesiastical. I want to underline this point: the aristocratic Genoese expatriate adopted, and over time reinforced, a series of positions whose radicalism is difficult to match in the panorama of contemporary Italian thought, and which appear remarkably broad-minded even when viewed in a larger, European perspective.

At the same time, and from the very beginning, Doria embedded these 'radical' positions within an outlook which was comprehensively hostile to the modern world. Doria was as opposed to its constitutive, individualist and utility-driven values as to its pursuit of interests and power; and he denounced the restriction of the exercise of power to the *arcana imperii* of reason of state, with its preference for an aggressive mercantile politics and its suppression of the liberty and dignity of nations. Moreover after an initial phase in which his thinking was influenced by 'orthodox Cartesianism', and in part also by views of Jansenist inspiration, the philosophical premises of this ensemble of 'anti-modern' positions became an ever more antiquated and intricate Platonism, which Doria deployed in an

⁵¹ Among my own contributions to the interpretation of Doria, I draw attention to my book, *Verso la "Vita civile". Antropologia e politica nelle lezioni accademiche di Gregorio Caloprese e Paolo Mattia Doria*, (Napoli, 1984).

uncompromising polemic against the 'moderns': Descartes, Locke and, above all, Spinoza.

Closer to the matter of religion, Doria's object was to combine an insistence on the absolute necessity of a 'return' to the ancient pagan civil virtues with a parallel return to ancient Christian values. These he cast, not (as Machiavelli had done) in opposition to the former, but as their necessary support. There were almost certainly prudential reasons to present his argument in these terms. Doria's reading included audacious contemporaries such as Saint-Évremond;⁵² he was accused of Spinozism; and at several points (for example his position on women), his positions betrayed an aristocratic tendency close to libertinism. Yet even allowing for a measure of prudence, Doria's thinking displays, in my view, a fundamental coherence, and a willingness openly to advance positions which were audacious and imprudent, as the eventual condemnation of his 'Idea di una perfetta repubblica' (Idea of a perfect Republic) would confirm.

This underlying coherence of inspiration did not exclude notable transformations in his thinking on the matter of religion, which ran in directions not always reconciled, or even reconcilable. Thus, for example, at the level of his theological anthropology, his familiarity with Augustinian, Jansenist intellectual culture left indelible traces in his pessimistic conception of man as a being of *amour-propre* and interests, in his astringent view of salvation as conceded by Grace to very few,⁵³ and, if less than in the even more Augustinian Vico, in his understanding of the separation of the 'supernatural' from the 'natural'. On this terrain, as on those of the corruption of customs, of the neglect of religious practices, of avidity and immorality, Doria gave no quarter in his 'anti-Epicurean' opposition to the laxism of the Jesuits and their missionary practices, especially in China, and more generally to the failings of the entire hierarchy of the Catholic Church.⁵⁴ In various unpublished writings—writings which could never

⁵² The use he made of Saint-Évremond on the different preaching of St Paul and St James to the gentiles and the Hebrews brought him, at least obliquely, to the point reached by Spinoza at the end of Ch ix of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

⁵³ 'La grazia efficace... l'esperienza c'insegna... Iddio la dà a pochi' (Experience teaches us that God gives saving Grace to few): P. M. Doria, 'Lettera... al Reverendissimo Padre Generale dela Compagnia di Gesù...', in *Manoscritti napoletani di Paolo Mattia Doria*, vol. I, ed. G. Belgioioso, (Galatina, 1981), 385.

⁵⁴ Potentially of great interest would be a study of Neapolitan involvement (lay as well as religious) in the 'Chinese controversies' of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Among the issues which had a bearing on the thinking of both Vico and, in particular, Doria were: the acceptability of Chinese chronology; the evaluation of the character of the 'Chinese nation'; judgement of the figure of Confucius (defended by the late

have been published, and whose intellectual consequences were therefore very limited—one encounters a severity, a ferocity in his accusations which is fully the equal of those he directed against modern state politics and their corruption of the ancient public virtues. Yet at the same time, at the anthropological but above all at the ethical-political level, Doria's 'anti-Stoic' polemic against Jansenism and its affectedly severe morality was no less strong, and from a conceptual (theologico-dogmatic) point of view, even more necessary. In this vein, Doria set himself to vindicate the rightness of good works, of 'that love for the human virtues... which, in the absence of perfect Charity can nevertheless, with the aid of Divine Grace, lead us adopt the virtue of justice'.⁵⁵

But there was more. In support of a complete reconciliation of Christianity with politics (at odds with every modern tendency to secularisation), Doria engaged in an audaciously complex (if in some respects confused) attempt to construct a new agreement between the Christian and gentile religions. Reproducing ideas of concord found in Renaissance neo-Platonism of a Ficinian, Hermetic inspiration (ideas which could be presented in accents of clearly Brunonian heterodoxy), Doria renewed the attempt to present a Christianity which embraced earlier gentile religions as its doctrinal or prophetic prefigurations. Both at the level of doctrine and at that of the reconstruction of the history of religious experiences, Doria expected that such an agreement would result in a common religious and civil *renovatio*, a revival of that original austere civil virtue whose restoration was Doria's great and abiding passion. With its echoes of Origen and Pelagius, however, this was an ambition redolent of even more dangerous heterodoxy, theological, doctrinal and anthropological.

Even as he sought to align himself with the Christian and Catholic camp, in bitter polemic against modern materialists, naturalists, and deists, Doria hardly presented himself as an innocuous 'loyal Catholic'. The positions he maintained over religion were extremely advanced, calling for a drastic reform of ecclesiastical institutions and customs which had been reduced to the same corrupt level as their civil counterparts, a reform which would return them to their ancient purity. At the same time, Doria joined to these positions an appeal for the renewal of the virtues of the ancients, and of the 'liberty of the ancients', even if these were

Doria against the accusation of 'Spinozism'), and the fruitful consequences of idolatrous superstition (a terrain on which, unusually, Vico was at bottom close to the 'benevolent' perspective of the Jesuits).

⁵⁵ Doria, 'Lettera... al Reverendissimo', *Manoscritti napoletani*, I, 385.

to be imposed by an authoritarian system of education whose intolerance was the reverse of the tolerance practiced by ancient pagan societies.

It cannot be denied that the positions adopted by Doria left him ever more isolated, and without subsequent influence. But there is still room for an enquiry which would treat Doria's arguments in the context of other reforming religious currents which were nourished within the world of Neapolitan Catholicism, including the various currents which inspired Celestino Galiani and Pietro Giannone, and later Antonio Genovesi. These currents need to be distinguished from the better-known, purely jurisdictional and regalist positions which the city's jurists and magistrates took up in opposition to ecclesiastical power, and for which Giannone provided powerful reinforcement in his *Civil History of the Kingdom of Naples* (1723). When these currents of religious reform are more fully explored, we may yet come to have an understanding of the scope for 'heterodoxy' in Naples which will enable us to set Doria's religious thinking against a fuller, more intellectually sympathetic background.

VI

The argument which I have presented in this paper has critical and methodological implications which transcend the interpretation of crucial points in the thought of Vico and Doria. These implications lie at different levels of discourse. The first of these concerns the methodological criteria to be born in mind when considering historical conditions in which the free expression of 'heterodox', 'radical' positions was effectively impeded. The well-known considerations emanating from the methodological perspective of Leo Strauss's *The Art of Writing* should not be under-valued. But we should also seek to limit the risks entailed by an inappropriate intensification of a methodology which would require research on any author to begin by identifying a hidden agenda, an 'esoteric' foundation underlying the arguments explicitly advanced in the author's works. Respect for the 'objective' character of an author's work is necessary if the interpreter is to restrain his or her constitutive tendency to hermeneutic violence. Besides, the 'intellectual consequences' of an author's works are closely connected with their explicit identity, even if this incorporates an element of prudential conformity designed to protect the author when discussing particularly delicate issues. Even so, I repeat my conclusion that in the case of Vico and perhaps even more in that of the ingenuous Doria (some of whose works were formally condemned), we are confronted by authors

who saw no need to disguise the choice of philosophical and religious principles and values on which their arguments were founded.

There is also the question of the attention which should be paid to the historiographical categories currently in play among scholars of the period relevant to the theme of this volume, and of the conference from which it derived. On this point I believe that categories such as 'radical Enlightenment', or 'radical thought', and their opposite, 'Conservative' or 'moderate Enlightenment', can prove—indeed have already proved—to be fruitful. Their value remains, however, conditional on our continuing awareness that their function is hermeneutical—that we employ each such category as no more than a 'concept historiographique et catégorie de travail', and avoid creating rigid dichotomies of a kind too often found of late (not a few of them in the nonetheless important works of Jonathan Israel).⁵⁶ In the same way it is possible to employ several other categories—such as 'Christian (or Catholic) Enlightenment', 'lumières catholiques', 'lumi cattolici' etc., not to mention other weaker instances of 'enlightened' tendencies—as long as we do so with due caution, and preserve a unitary interpretative perspective for the Enlightenment as a whole, guarding against its dissolution into 'national contexts'. Employing these terms, our discourse can cover a significant spectrum of Neapolitan and more generally Italian intellectual culture, including but going beyond Vico and Doria. A good example, still requiring study, would be the forms of reception of 'Giannonian' thought in Naples.

The thought of the 'Christian Enlightenment' in particular, while it may have cut off at the root the possibility of an unprejudiced exercise of 'reason', did not prevent, in forms probably best associated with 'moderate Enlightenment', the taking of positions of ideological and political interest for 'the modern world'. These include, in the case of the late Doria,

⁵⁶ The quoted words are those of Jonathan Israel himself, in 'Unité ed diversité des lumières radicales. Typologie des ses intellectuels et de ses racines culturelles', in *Qu'est-ce que les lumières «radicales»? Libertinage, athéisme et spinozisme dans le tournant philosophique de l'âge classique*, ed. C. Secrétan, T. Dagron, & L. Bove, (Paris, 2007), 38. The volume contains statements of the strikingly opposed visions of 'radical Enlightenment' offered by Margaret Jacob and Jonathan Israel. The former maintains that it was a movement made up of a plurality and variety of intellectual experiences, arguments and authors; the latter relates it 'monistically' to the centrality of Spinozism, understood as a monism capable of bringing together 'une philosophie morale, une métaphysique et une épistémologie matérialistes dans un système théorique libertaire, tolérant, émancipateur et égalitaire et dans une philosophie politique républicaine', *ibid.*, 55. It is clear that the latter vision leaves no space for less coherent and systematic 'heterodoxies', still less if they are contained within positions of a clearly 'orthodox' derivation.

positions opposed to the way in which commerce was leading to the primacy of 'finance', and to the imperial designs of the great modern absolutist states. For some time, I have maintained that many of the most 'radical' positions and proposals to be found in the economic, social, ethical and political thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have at their base a preference for 'ancient values'. They express a 'nostalgic' yearning for the public, communitarian virtues of antiquity, for a world whose customs are still simple and uncorrupted, even if this by no means indicates inability also to think realistically about the force of individual interests. In this respect an author such as Doria (if not so obviously Vico) may readily be associated with authors who are thought of as protagonists of high Enlightenment, including Rousseau, Condillac, Mably and Helvétius (the last two, of course, accounted by Israel among the genuine radicals).

Beyond Vico and Doria, therefore, there are categories—'radical anti-modern thought', 'communitarian', or 'nostalgic' Enlightenment, even the vaguely oxymoronic 'Catholic Enlightenment'—which a focus on 'the intellectual consequences of heterodoxy' invites us to introduce and to debate. We should not do so with the intention of fragmenting yet again an intellectual movement which still possesses many unifying characteristics (and here I am strongly in agreement with critical positions recently taken up by Jonathan Israel and John Robertson). Rather, we should endeavour to reconstruct, with attention, patience and flexibility in our choice of concepts, both what was distinct and individual and what was common and connected in this decisive epoch of western history.

Translated by John Robertson

CONYERS MIDDLETON:
THE HISTORICAL CONSEQUENCES OF HETERODOXY

Brian Young

A Friend of Diagoras the Philosopher, call'd the *Atheist*, having found him once in a *Temple*, as the Story is told by Cicero, *You*, says he, *who think the Gods take no notice of human Affairs*, do not you see here *by this Number of Pictures*, how many people for the sake of their Vows have been saved in Storms at Sea, and got safe into Harbour? Yes, says, Diagoras, *I see how it is; for those are never painted, who happen to be drowned*.

*Conyers Middleton, A Letter from Rome*¹

How does heterodoxy, 'other teaching', attempt to gain authority in a world dominated, intellectually and religiously, by orthodoxy? This essay offers a perspective on the problem by focusing on Conyers Middleton (1683–1750), a thinker who was more than usually aware of the ambiguities at the core of his own heterodox assault on the status of theological (and historical) orthodoxy in eighteenth-century England. To begin, then, with an observation by one of those who classically enunciated the right to toleration, and whose own religious thinking was widely assumed to be heterodox: 'For every Church is orthodox to it self; to others Erroneous or Heretical.'² So, of course, declared John Locke in his *Letter Concerning Toleration*, and it is a phrase that seems unproblematic to modern

¹ Conyers Middleton, *A Letter from Rome, shewing an exact conformity between Popery and Paganism: or, the religion of the present Romans to be derived entirely from that of their heathen ancestors* (London, 1729), 23, citing (and translating) Cicero *de Natura Deorum*, 3.89. I am grateful to Noël Sugimura and Mishtooni Bose for reading and commenting on the essay. The insights of a Milton scholar and a student of late-medieval heresy have been especially beneficial in helping me think about heterodoxy.

² John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, English transl. by William Popple (London, 1689), 9–16. Popple, in common with his uncle, Andrew Marvell, was religiously heterodox, on which see Caroline Robbins, 'Absolute Liberty: the life and thought of William Popple, 1638–1708' in Barbara Taft ed., *Absolute Liberty: a selection from the articles and papers of Caroline Robbins* (Hamden, Conn., 1982), 3–30. On Locke and heterodoxy, see John Marshall, *John Locke: resistance, religion, and responsibility* (Cambridge, 1994), and *John Locke, toleration, and early Enlightenment culture: religious intolerance and arguments for religious toleration in early modern and 'Early Enlightenment' Europe* (Cambridge, 2006).

readers. Problematic, however, it certainly is, not least as orthodoxy, 'right teaching', requires, by definition, an authoritative structure of institutions and contexts, firmly defining the parameters within which 'right' thinking and debate about such thinking might take place. For clerical critics of Locke, who were legion, his assertion was paradoxically individualistic, implying as he had that churches were merely *personae fictae*: orthodoxy, for his critics, was a communal *fiat*, and it simply could not be a matter of self-description.³

Eighteenth-century critics of orthodoxy often, nevertheless, appealed to Locke's sentiment in authorising their doubts, but it was not an apologetic tactic that their self-consciously orthodox opponents found particularly impressive.⁴ When Middleton wrote his most scandalously heterodox work, the *Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church, from the earliest ages through several successive centuries* (1749), he sought intellectual authority for his undertaking by noticing that Locke had adverted to the questionable nature of the miracles of the early Church in his *Third Letter Concerning Toleration*.⁵ Initiating his reply to Middleton, John Wesley relished yet another paradox of religious belief and practice at work here: 'You open the cause artfully enough, by a quotation from Mr. Locke. But we are agreed, to build our Faith on no man's authority.'⁶

Wesley had cut to the apologetic quick in criticising Middleton's enterprise by undermining the standing of his would-be legitimating authority. How, therefore, could heterodoxy define its own claims to authority, particularly when, artfully or otherwise, it did so from within a Christian, or at least a semi-Christian, framework? Examination of the writings of Middleton allows one to address this question, observing in the process

³ On the reasoning of one such critic, see Mark Goldie, 'John Locke, Jonas Proast and religious toleration, 1688–1692', in John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor eds., *The Church of England c. 1689–c. 1833: from Toleration to Tractarianism* (Cambridge, 1993), 143–71. More broadly, see J. G. A. Pocock, 'Within the margins: the definitions of orthodoxy' in Roger D. Lund ed., *The Margins of Orthodoxy: heterodox writing and cultural response 1660–1750* (Cambridge, 1995), 33–53.

⁴ See B. W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: theological debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1998).

⁵ Middleton, *A Free Inquiry Into the Miraculous Powers, which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church, from the Earliest Ages through several successive centuries* (1749), iii–vi. For the socio-cultural contexts in which his work appeared, see Jane Shaw, *Miracles in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, Conn., 2006).

⁶ John Wesley, *A Letter to the Reverend Doctor Conyers Middleton, Occasion'd by his late Free Inquiry* (London, 1749), 5.

how religion was beginning to be absorbed by history in his thought, a process accelerated in the work of Voltaire and Edward Gibbon, both of whom were strongly influenced by his writings.⁷ Middleton was also, however, both absorbed and resisted in the religious history produced by other liberal thinkers, such as John Jortin (1698–1770), a less heterodox, but not exactly orthodox, Cambridge-bred ecclesiastical historian. Jortin, Middleton's junior by just over a decade, would come to influence Gibbon, as well as Middleton had, but the latter predominated in helping to form both Gibbon's thinking about religion and his approach to the writing of history.

By taking seriously Middleton's orthodox opponents, and their attempts to define their orthodoxy in opposition to his heterodoxy, the essay offers a complementary appreciation of Middleton's theologico-historical enterprise to that expounded in a bracingly anticlerical, and in every sense classic, piece by the late Hugh Trevor-Roper. In his long essay, 'From Deism to History: Conyers Middleton', Trevor-Roper emphasised the deistic turn in Middleton's thinking, and hence his role in the secularisation of historical thinking that he goes on to trace in the work of Voltaire and Gibbon.⁸ This is, however, but one element in the processes of Enlightenment, and the present essay is more concerned to stress the nuances and ambiguities at play in such intellectual dialectic. It will also take more seriously the contribution of clerical opponents of Middleton than Trevor-Roper does, not because it agrees with them, but because polemic needs to be historicised if it is not to be deployed for later, equally mischievous (and enjoyable) polemic, albeit, like Middleton's, with a serious historical and scholarly purpose. Trevor-Roper's essay was also decidedly biographical in character, and the witness of Middleton's private papers that is so central to his work in historical recovery will not be much appealed to here, primarily

⁷ Norman L. Torrey, *Voltaire and the English Deists* (Oxford, 1963), 173–74. On the various contexts of Middleton's influence on Gibbon see especially Joseph M. Levine's discussion of 'Edward Gibbon and the Johannine Comma' in *The Autonomy of History: truth and method from Erasmus to Gibbon* (Chicago, Ill., 1999), 157–240, a magisterial treatment of several of the issues at the core of the present essay. Middleton is also a central presence in the argument of David Womersley, *Gibbon and the 'Watchmen of the Holy City': the historian and his reputation 1776–1815* (Oxford, 2002).

⁸ Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'From Deism to History: Conyers Middleton', in *History and Enlightenment*, (New Haven, Conn, 2010), 71–119. Robert G. Ingram, '“The Weight of Historical Evidence”: Conyers Middleton and the Eighteenth-Century Miracles Debate' in Robert D. Cornwall and William Gibson eds., *Religion, Politics and Dissent 1660–1832: Essays in Honour of James E. Bradley* (Farnham, 2010), 85–109, appeared after I had completed this essay. Ingram's argument complements that made here.

because the present essay is concerned with the very public nature of the style of heterodoxy that Middleton promoted.

Indeed, Middleton's feline appreciation of his role as a citizen of the republic of letters is absolutely central to the contours of thought he laid out in his works. How far he dared to speak publicly, including in printed formulations of the need to be 'candid'—a favoured word of his—is the fulcrum of much that he sought to do in his published writings, and so it is with them, and the responses they elicited, that the present essay is chiefly concerned.

Middleton's was a particularly Anglican brand of classicising, anti-metaphysical heterodoxy, sceptically if pronouncedly historical in orientation, whilst committed to the cause of something very like natural, as opposed to purely revealed, religion. How reason was informed by history was at least as important to Middleton's style of thought as was the allied question of how reason ought to be applied to our understanding of history. Whether he satisfactorily resolved this matter is an open question: the relationship between civil and sacred history was one that commanded the attention of a great many thinkers in eighteenth-century Europe, often to inescapably heterodox ends.⁹ Middleton plainly preferred what he called 'the Ciceronian age', celebrated in his *Life of Cicero* (1741), to that of the early Church, excoriated in *A Free Inquiry* eight years later.¹⁰ The conflict between the internal imperatives of his classicising temperament and the externally applied dictates of theological orthodoxy is central to his heterodox thought and writing.¹¹ How he negotiated this says

⁹ For invaluable discussion of Vico's thinking in this context, for example, see John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680–1760* (Cambridge, 2005), 201–55. More broadly, see Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time: the history of the earth and the history of nations from Hooker to Vico*, English transl. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago, Ill., 1984).

¹⁰ Middleton, *The History of the Life of M. Tullius Cicero* (3rd edn., 3 vols, London, 1742), i. xxx. The three-volume edition quickly established itself as the authoritative version of the text. On the controversies in which the work quickly became enmeshed, see Joseph M. Levine, '“Et Tu Brute?” History and forgery in 18th-century England' in Robin Myers and Michael Harris eds., *Fakes and frauds: varieties of deception in print and manuscript* (Winchester, 1989), 71–97. On its significant role in mid-eighteenth-century politics, see Reed Browning, *Political and constitutional ideas of the Court Whigs* (Baton Rouge, Ind., 1982), 222–25.

¹¹ John A. Dussinger rightly makes much, in his authoritative *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Middleton, of a letter to Lord Hervey written in July 1733, in the course of which Middleton declared: 'It is my misfortune to have had so early a taste of pagan sense, as to make me very squeamish in my christian studies.' (BL Add. Mss. 32,458, fo. 185).

much about the mutuality of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and what Rowan Williams, then Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford, said about theological orthodoxy in 1989—that it is: ‘*constructed*, in the processes of both theological and political conflict; which means that understanding it fully should involve understanding those conflicts’—can also be said of heterodoxy.¹² It is the purpose of this essay to reach such an understanding of heterodoxy as it developed in eighteenth-century England.

I

Heterodoxy in early modern Europe often developed in reaction against the supposed authority of tradition in religious, especially Protestant, apologetic. How, then, as Patristic study established itself firmly within the Church of England, did the increasingly privileged status of the Church Fathers affect the standing of the *sola scriptura* nature (or, dare one say, tradition?) of much Protestant teaching? As Jean-Louis Quantin has now definitively demonstrated, the reception and absorption of the Church Fathers in seventeenth-century England was a decidedly complicated process, sometimes resulting in the creation of a ‘radical orthodoxy’ that came perilously close at times to heterodoxy.¹³ Quantin has also noted the important role that Middleton (whom he considers a freethinker rather than a *sola scriptura* Protestant) played in undermining Patristic authority in the eighteenth century.¹⁴ In exploring the conflicts that defined heterodoxy as well as orthodoxy, it is vital to see how often they were mired for Anglicans in debates concerning the Church Fathers. Locke was always an undoubtedly problematic authority for theologians to cite, but to have done so, as Middleton did, against the often precarious stability supplied by Patristics for defenders of Anglican orthodoxy was doubly difficult. The dialectic between reason and tradition provided the central dynamic for much Anglican theology from the time of Richard Hooker onwards, and Middleton saw it as his duty definitively to undermine tradition, as

¹² Rowan Williams ‘Preface’ to Williams ed., *The making of orthodoxy: essays in honour of Henry Chadwick* (Cambridge, 1989), viii–xi, at p. ix.

¹³ Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: the construction of a confessional identity in the seventeenth century* (Oxford, 2009), esp. 366–95, and 407–11, and the same author’s ‘Anglican Scholarship gone Mad: Henry Dodwell (1641–1711) and Christian Antiquity’ in Christopher Ligota and Jean-Louis Quantin eds., *History of Scholarship: a selection of papers from the seminar in the history of scholarship held annually at the Warburg Institute* (Oxford, 2006), 305–56.

¹⁴ Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity*, 2, 26, 380, 408.

represented by Patristics, in favour of the reason he associated with Locke. This was, inevitably, a controversial intellectual trajectory to follow in mid-eighteenth-century England. How did Middleton come to adopt it, and what were its major features?

At the heart of his convictions was his classicism, as is apparent in the work that first revealed his gradual departure from the moorings of orthodoxy, *A Letter from Rome* (1729). His lifelong dedication to the world of ancient Rome in particular is both recalled and projected in a revealing moment of self-examination, initiated by an equally telling repudiation of the sights allegedly associated with St Peter:

It was no Part of my Design to spend my Time Abroad in attending to ridiculous Fictions of this kind: The Pleasure I had chiefly proposed to myself, was to visit the genuine Remains and *venerable Reliques of Pagan Rome*; the *authentick Monuments of Antiquity* that demonstrate the Certainty of those Histories, which are the Entertainment, as well as the Instruction of our younger Years; and which, by the early Prejudice of being the first Knowledge we acquire, as well as the Delight they give in describing the Lives and Manners of the greatest Men that ever lived, gain sometimes so much upon our riper Age, as to exclude, too often, other more useful and necessary Studies: I could not help flattering myself with the Joy I should have in viewing the *very Place and Scene* of those important Events, the Knowledge and Explication of which have ever since been the chief Employment of the learned and polite World; in *treading that Ground*, where at every Step we stumble on the Ruins of *some Fabrick* described by the *Antients*, and cannot help setting a Foot on the *Memorial* of some *Action*, in which the *great Heroes of Antiquities* had been personally engaged. I amused myself with the Thoughts of taking a turn in those very Walks where Cicero and his Friends had held *their Philosophical Disputations*, or standing on that very Spot, where he had delivered some of his *famous Orations*.¹⁵

Middleton was making explicit his substitution of a humanistically-driven Grand Tour for a conventional Christian pilgrimage, for classics over theology, and the tension between a classical education and a pious vocation that lies at the core of so much of his writing here problematically colours his largely conventional Protestant critique of Catholic Rome, replete with an appeal to a Providence that had allowed him the opportunity of 'detecting and exposing, as far as I was able, the true Spring and Source of those Impostures, which, under the Name of Religion, have been forged and contrived from Time to Time for no other Purpose, than to oppress the

¹⁵ *A Letter from Rome*, 11–12.

Liberty, as well as engross the Property of Mankind.¹⁶ Here the rhetoric of Protestantism chimes with the freethinking critique of priestcraft, as does the whole of the text, leaving it an altogether ambivalent and ambiguous statement for a clergyman to have written.¹⁷ After all, what is one to infer from his condemnation of the French traveller Tournefort's piously Catholic indictment of Greek Orthodox practices—observed in travels through Greece—as a continuation of ancient Greek heathenism, other than that Middleton might be similarly guilty of intellectual double-standards, consciously or otherwise?¹⁸ What exactly might be left of Christianity, once it had been subjected to the stringent claims of rational religion and historical enquiry, was to become the increasingly elusive quarry of Middleton's heterodoxy. It is an issue latent in *A Letter from Rome*, and would become explicit some twenty years later in *A Free Inquiry*.

Cicero and Livy were the two authors most appealed to by Middleton in paralleling heathenism and Roman Catholicism in *A Letter from Rome*: Cicero was quickly to become a marked obsession in his life and writings. Indeed, his life of Cicero was the work for which he was most celebrated during his lifetime, and for some considerable time afterwards. Middleton's Cicero, presented in English that was as self-consciously polished as Cicero's own Latin prose style, was a model of the classical virtues as discerned by the eighteenth-century historical imagination. In tracing Cicero's religious life and thought, Middleton found a means of reconciling his classical inclinations with his frustrations concerning orthodox Christianity, and here lies the second major feature of his journey into heterodoxy: his identification with the truthful superiority of natural religion, when contrasted with the dubieties of the practices associated with revealed religion. The distance between the two was mordantly revealed

¹⁶ *A Letter from Rome*, 3.

¹⁷ On the wider valences of which, see Mark Goldie 'Priestcraft and the birth of Whiggism' in Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner eds., *Political discourse in early modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993), 209–31, and Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: the Church of England and its enemies 1660–1730* (Cambridge, 1992).

¹⁸ *A Letter from Rome*, 50–1. Tournefort's remarks surely leave more room for ambiguity regarding Catholic parallels, at least of a popular kind, than Middleton allows: 'peut-être aussi que cette multiplité de Chapelles est une suite de l'ancienne coutume qu'on avoit en Grèce d'élever de petits temples aus faux dieux: il est certain que les Grecs ont retenu bien des pratiques du paganisme entre autres celle de faire danser leurs Saints, au Son des sisters & des tymbales: on le pratique de même en Provence aux jours de bonnes Fêtes.' (Josph Pitton de Tournefort, *Relation d'un voyage du Levant, Fait par ordre la Roy* (3 vols, Lyon, 1717), i. 135. In common with Middleton, Tournefort had made an explicit parallel between modern and classical Greece in relation to ceremonies and rituals concerning death: *Relation d'un voyage Levant*, i. 151–53.

in the 'Preface' to the work in Middleton's apologetically economical evocation of the site of Cicero's family home:

But there cannot be a better proof of the delightfulness of the place, than that it is now possessed by a Convent of Monks, and called the Villa of St. Dominic. Strange revolution to see *Cicero's porticos* converted to *Monkish cloisters!* the seat of the most refined reason, wit, and learning, to a nursery of superstition, bigotry, and enthusiasm! What a pleasure must it give to these Dominican *Inquisitors*, to trample on the ruins of a man, whose writings, by spreading the light of reason and liberty thro' the world, have been one great instrument of obstructing their unwearied pains to enslave it.¹⁹

Distance is not, however, tantamount to dismissal, and a commitment to rational religion strongly girded Middleton's concentrated critique of its abuses. Roman Catholicism provided the focus of his critique of doctrinally-driven religion in all of his controversial writings, allowing him to appear to purge Christianity of such supposed corruptions in the accents of a purified, rationally-grounded and very Protestant discourse of something very like civil religion. Cicero provided him with the philosophical prototype in the classical world of what Middleton wished to promote as the rational religion of Enlightenment England.

Cicero's personal religious belief, as opposed to his support for and participation in public religion, remains the subject of much scholarly debate. For Middleton the matter was relatively straightforward: Cicero was a believer in natural religion, including the genuine prospect of a life after death, who conformed outwardly, for properly considered socio-political reasons, to the public religion of ancient Rome. Intriguingly, Middleton began his life of the philosopher-politician with a polite dismissal of Plutarch's invocation of prodigies at Cicero's birth, explaining that 'we may charge them to the credulity, or the invention of a writer, who loves to raise the solemnity of his story by the introduction of something miraculous.'²⁰ Here, in classical Rome, is a mediating passage between the arguments of *A Letter from Rome* and those shortly to be propounded in *A Free Inquiry*; the same appetite for the wonderful that marked the ancient heathen world would later (in Middleton's estimation, as much as in that of David Hume), be fed by the miracle stories of the early Church. In ancient Rome, however, the senatorial class knew how to keep such enthusiasm in check,

¹⁹ *Life of Cicero*, i. xxxi–xxxii.

²⁰ *Life of Cicero*, i. 1–2. He was surprised (i. 372) that Plutarch did not mention a well-attested prodigy: Cicero's dream of greatness.

and Middleton referred admiringly to this; he also fleetingly mentioned, but did not elaborate on, Cicero's politic use of a '*pretended prodigy*' in relation to Catiline's conspiracy, something surely altogether less admirable from Middleton's perspective, if, perhaps, understandable in its immediate historical context.²¹

The religion of ancient Rome, as practised by Cicero, was supremely that of *pietas*, a sceptically conservative fusion of good manners, mores, and politics. This was apparent in Cicero's decision, taken in exile, to visit all the sacred sites he could, at least as this was explicated by Middleton in a literal evocation of paganism: 'This would give him an opportunity of shewing himself every where in a light, which naturally attracts the affection of the multitude, by testifying a pious regard to the favourite superstitions and local religions of the Country'.²² A statesman knew how to conform to the prevailing superstition of his country, but a statesman who was also a philosopher could also stand as a type for all who shared in the true religion, which we can legitimately infer was, for Middleton, a still residually Christianised form of natural religion. The religion he ascribed to Cicero was certainly consistent with that of an eighteenth-century English rational believer: Cicero believed, Middleton insisted, in God, in Providence, and in life after death, a life furthermore in which there would be merited rewards and just punishments.²³ This was rather more than most eighteenth-century deists would have granted, as providence was a matter of some dispute amongst them, and the notion of post-mortem judgement was similarly controversial. Cicero's occasional doubts about the future life, moreover, were judged to be entirely consistent with his commitments to the Academic philosophy, praised by Middleton as 'the most rational, and modest, and the best adapted to the discovery of truth' of all classical philosophies.²⁴ More seriously, one has to reflect on Middleton's vital qualification that Cicero's otherwise entirely 'natural' variety of religious belief and commitment was, in contrast with that of the generality of ancient Rome, 'undoubtedly of *heavenly extraction*'.²⁵

It is important, therefore, to be explicit about what can otherwise look merely implicit in Middleton's understanding of Cicero's personal religion. Middleton's appreciation of Cicero was very explicitly in the tradition of

²¹ *Life of Cicero*, i. 217–18, 262; ii. 58.

²² *Life of Cicero*, ii. 22.

²³ *Life of Cicero*, iii. 340–44.

²⁴ *Life of Cicero*, iii. 356, 332–33.

²⁵ *Life of Cicero*, iii. 349.

Christian humanism championed by Erasmus, whose sanctification of the philosopher was vigorously echoed in Middleton's text.²⁶ Middleton was both a classicist and an Erasmian, and his brand of sceptically religious Enlightenment is part of a process of Enlightenment experienced *within* piety that Hugh Trevor-Roper has traced from the sixteenth into the eighteenth centuries.²⁷ Trevor-Roper removes him from this direct lineage, however, insistently identifying Middleton's Christian heterodoxy as gentlemanly deism, partly through reading between the lines of Middleton's concertedly Erasmian reading of Cicero's religion rather than taking him entirely at his printed word. Trevor-Roper forms this conclusion largely through appeal to Middleton's private letters and unpublished papers; what matters in understanding the public nature of Middleton's heterodoxy, however, is that it was consciously shaped within an Erasmian approach to a religion that was dependent on texts as well as philosophies. Middleton was startlingly clear in citing Erasmus on the Deity as having directly inspired Cicero; he may, of course, have wanted to put readers off his deistic scent, but it seems more likely that he was, in his way, a consistently Erasmian Christian, and, as Trevor-Roper has shown in relation to other Christian thinkers, this is perfectly compatible with a man such as Middleton having had doubts, for example, about the alleged scriptural authorisation of the doctrine of the Trinity, which was precisely the sort of textual and metaphysical jumble that Middleton would come to criticise with increasing frequency in the remaining decade of his life.²⁸

It is interesting to observe at this juncture that the first subject of Middleton's public disapprobation, Richard Bentley, the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, where Middleton had been a fellow, had had similar misgivings about the authenticity of I John v. 7.²⁹ This text, the so-called 'Johannine comma', the only direct Trinitarian reference in the New Testament, had troubled Erasmus, and his principled rejection of it centrally informed the Socinian Enlightenment that Trevor-Roper and

²⁶ *Life of Cicero*, iii. 286, 301, 354.

²⁷ Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The religious origins of the Enlightenment' in *Religion, the Reformation and social change* (London, 1967), 179–218, an argument that informs several of the pieces collected in *Renaissance Essays* (London, 1985), *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans: seventeenth-century essays* (London, 1987), and *From Counter-Reformation to Glorious Revolution* (London, 1992). On Erasmus's posthumous reputation and influence, see Bruce Mansfield, *Phoenix of his age: interpretations of Erasmus c. 1550–1750* (Toronto, 1979) and *Interpretations of Erasmus c. 1750–1920: man on his own* (Toronto, 1992).

²⁸ Trevor-Roper, 'The religious origins of the Enlightenment', and Levine, *The Autonomy of History*.

²⁹ On which, see James Henry Monk, *Life of Richard Bentley, D.D.* (London, 1830), 148–51.

J. G. A. Pocock have both convincingly identified as an immediate predecessor to a broader, religiously non-aligned Enlightenment.³⁰ Bentley was also one of the great champions of post-Hobbesian orthodoxy, having given the first of the Boyle lectures in favour of Christian revelation. Despite Bentley's support of a favoured element in Socinianising scholarship, it was his exalted status as an orthodox apologist (and classical scholar) that had probably originally encouraged Middleton's own heterodoxy to develop in the way that it did. Middleton's devotion to classical studies, concerned with the lessons of heroic biography and the pleasures of literary emulation, had taken a rather different turn from that of Bentley, with the latter's total immersion in the altogether contrasting rigours of textual emendation, both classical and Scriptural (and some combination of both, as manifested in his pioneering work on the supremely heterodox poetry that is Milton's *Paradise Lost*).³¹ Many of Middleton's contemporaries identified in the vituperative quarrel with Bentley the source of a disenchantment with the orthodox mainstream that eventually soured into an open espousal of heterodoxy, and Middleton himself colluded with such a reading by pleading (largely in his correspondence) his lack of preferment as a motivating cause of his increasingly open assault on the citadels of orthodoxy.³² The complicated world of intellectual patronage undoubtedly played a part in all of this, but it should not obscure an appreciation of the defiantly public nature of Middleton's cultivated heterodoxy, and of the need for the historian to pay due attention to the variously detailed elements at work within it.

In order to understand the resolutely public nature of Middleton's heterodoxy, it is necessary to consider precisely how he conducted the polemical warfare in which he engaged at the end of his life, of which the encounters with Bentley, the *Letter from Rome*, and the *Life of Cicero*

³⁰ Trevor-Roper, 'The religious origins of the Enlightenment', and J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, i. *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737–1764* (Cambridge, 1999).

³¹ Monk, *Life of Bentley*, passim; Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from 1300 to 1850* (Oxford, 1976), 143–58, 160; U. van Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *History of Classical Scholarship*, English trans. by Alan Harris, Hugh Lloyd-Jones ed., (London, 1982), 78–82, 131; Joseph M. Levine, 'Bentley's Milton: philology and criticism in eighteenth-century England', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50 (1989), 549–68. On the all pervasive interpenetration of (largely heterodox) thinking and poetry in Milton's work, see N. K. Sugimura, *Matter of Glorious Trial: Material and Spiritual Substance in Paradise Lost* (New Haven, Conn., 2009).

³² See the account of 'Conyers Middleton' in John Nichols, *Literary anecdotes of the eighteenth century* (10 vols, London, 1812–16), v. 405–23.

were early declarations of intent.³³ Indissolubly prominent in this are matters of rhetoric and style; in this respect, above all others, Middleton is at one with the essentially linguistic emphasis in English heterodoxy as this was explored by Hobbes and his successors (and opponents).³⁴ First, and most obviously, whilst Middleton was centrally concerned with Greek and Latin texts, he chose to write about them in English. This entailed translating and paraphrasing classical and Patristic texts, and herein resided one of the greatest problems for his heterodox enterprise, as his orthodox opponents often disputed the validity, and even the honesty, of such work. Secondly, his deployment of the language of candour is immensely significant; his was an argument about intellectual liberty, and about the nature of intellectually acceptable boundaries: not for nothing was his most notorious work entitled *A Free Inquiry*. Thirdly, his was a doctrine not just of understanding, but also, supremely and eloquently, of practice. Consequently, the best way of experiencing the true nature of Middleton's heterodoxy is to see how it was enunciated in *A Free Inquiry*, and how this was subsequently both echoed and deflected by those who wrote in its immediate wake.

II

As the *Life of Cicero* had enunciated a complex, residually Christian, defence of natural religion, so *A Letter from Rome* had announced a pre-occupation with social virtue that both echoed the ancients and also subtly adumbrated a rhetorically Protestant critique of priestcraft. This precarious balancing act was to be carried to its utmost limits by Gibbon.³⁵ Something of it can be heard in a passage from *A Letter from Rome*, contrasting euhemerised ancient heroes with Catholic saints, which heralded the much more controversial intellectual travails that were later to inform the creation, and the reception, of *A Free Inquiry*.

³³ He had also taken on the orthodoxy of the prominent Cambridge divine Daniel Waterland in the 1730s, on which see John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the age of the Enlightenment: science, religion and politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1993), 138–40.

³⁴ On which see Quentin Skinner, *Rhetoric and reason in the philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996), and Jon Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan: the reception of the political and religious ideas of Thomas Hobbes in England, 1640–1700* (Cambridge, 2007).

³⁵ B. W. Young, "Scepticism in excess": Gibbon and eighteenth-century Christianity', *Historical Journal* 41 (1998), 179–99.

If there be any real Difference, most People, I dare say, will be apt to determine in Favour of the *old Possessors*: For those *Heroes of Antiquity* were raised up into Gods, and received *Divine Honours* in Acknowledgement for some *signal Benefits* they had been the *Authors* of to Mankind; as in the *Invention of Arts and Sciences*, or of something highly useful and necessary to Life: whereas of the *Roman Saints*, 'tis certain that many of them were never heard of, but in their own *Legends or fabulous Histories*; and many more, instead of any Services done to Mankind, owe all the Honours now paid them, to their *Vices* or their *Errors*; whose Merit, like *the Story of Demetrius in the Gospel*, was that only of raising Rebellion in Defence of *their Idol*, and throwing whole Kingdoms into Convulsions for the Sake of some *gainful Imposture*.³⁶

The legends and '*fabulous Histories*' of early Christianity were increasingly to preoccupy Middleton, as became apparent in two of the final three substantial works he published in his lifetime, *An Introductory Discourse to a Larger Work* (1747) and *A Free Inquiry*. These are the works which definitively marked, for many of his eighteenth-century readers, a transition from classicising Protestantism to dangerous religious scepticism. The *Introductory Discourse* is written in the accents of rational religion, in which Middleton sets his standard in alliance with Chillingworth's defence of Protestantism, regretting the insufficient reformation of the Church in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The content of the 'larger work' it prefaces is identified as a critique of the reverence paid to the Church Fathers by self-consciously orthodox Anglican divines. Patristics is not for Middleton a source of orthodox inspiration, but a subject ripe for historical analysis, as he insists that the proper use of this field of study is to teach the student about the doctrines, rites, manners, and learning of the periods in which the early Christians lived, about which matters the Fathers are to be read as witnesses, not as definitive guides.³⁷ In a Chillingworth-like conclusion, he declares that historical study will reveal how the errors of the Fathers corrupted the Church, and that it will ultimately serve as a means for their removal in accordance with the Protestant aim of reducing doctrine and practice 'to the original test and standard of the Holy Scriptures.'³⁸ In thus repudiating the Fathers as a privileged source of orthodox authority, Middleton was knowingly turning his back on a vigorous tradition in Anglican scholarship and piety,

³⁶ *Letter from Rome*, 33. The allusion is to Acts xix.21.

³⁷ Middleton, *An Introductory Discourse to a larger work, designed hereafter to be published* (London, 1747), 45–57.

³⁸ *An Introductory Discourse*, 57.

one which continued to have many defenders in mid-eighteenth-century England.

The apologetic crux of *A Free Inquiry*—as well as its fundamental argumentative problem, only ever fleetingly glanced at by Middleton—is to be found in the claim, which appears halfway through the text, that ‘The History of the Gospel, I hope may be true, though the History of the Church be fabulous.’³⁹ This was the problem he had had to negotiate, and his perceived failure to do so was the occasion of the many scandalised replies produced by his clerical critics. He had early attempted to see off such clerics in the preface to the work, when he observed that it was the product of the ‘philosophic freedom of a studious . . . life’, which he contrasted with the ‘ambitious’ life led by those in search of preferment:⁴⁰ the orthodox were always to Middleton self-interested, promoting conventional pieties in order to secure for themselves the temporal gifts of the Church. The accusation of ‘craft’, and especially of priestcraft, was never far below the surface both in his criticisms of the Fathers and of their orthodox apologists. In this way, the rhetoric of anti-dogmatic Protestantism melded, often imperceptibly, with that of freethinking.

It is at this apologetically complicated juncture that one has to consider the relationship between Middleton’s conscious heterodoxy and his own lack of preferment in the Church, particularly as this is revealed in his private correspondence. In so doing, one can begin to appreciate the subtleties attendant on the play he made between his public and his private *personae*. Cynicism is all too easily attributed, however, and one needs to read beyond that ready conclusion to get to the core of his meaning. Irony is certainly to the fore in his letter of September 1733 to Lord Hervey, but it is at least as *other*-directed as it is self-directed, since it is rather more the implied impiety of the orthodox that he indicts, as it is his own uncomfortably knowing relationship with Scripture:

Those slumberers in stalls suspect me very unjustly of ill designs against the peace; for though there are many things in the church, that I wholly dislike, yet whilst I am content to acquiesce in the ill, I should be glad to own, to taste a little of the good, & to have some amends of that ruling assent & consent, which no man of sense can oppose.—We read of some of the earliest disciples of Christ, who followed him not for his works, but for his loaves. These were certainly blameable because they saw his miracles, but

³⁹ *A Free Inquiry*, 162.

⁴⁰ *A Free Inquiry*, vii.

to us, who had not the happiness to see the one, it may be allowed to have some inclination to the other.⁴¹

This is certainly, and quite deliberately shocking, as well as highly amusing, but it is the orthodox who appear the more compromised according to its no doubt self-serving logic, and this letter needs to be read alongside one that precedes it in Middleton's manuscripts, as these are now preserved in the British Library.

In a letter to Hervey dating from 1735, approving the argument of Benjamin Hoadly's newly-published and deeply controversial tract, *A Plain Account of the Nature and End of the Lord's Supper*, Middleton had emphasised his own commitment to the variety of rational religion he discerned as central to the heterodox bishop of Winchester's case, before adverting, satirically, to the structural riches of his see:

I like both his design & the doctrine, as I do every design of reconciling religion with reason, or where such cannot be, of bringing them as nearly together as possible.—His enemies will insult him with the charge of lessening Christian piety, but the candid will see that he seeks only to destroy a superstitious deception by establishing a rational one in its place. But as to throwing down the shrines and altars of the Church, he will certainly raise no small stir from the men of craft, so I rejoice much with your L[ordshi]p's wish that he has secured the good castle of Farnham for a retreat.⁴²

Here was fellow feeling with a rational Christian divine, whose own tendencies to heterodoxy had also made him a marked man, but who, unlike Middleton, had yet achieved some of the richest rewards offered by the established Church (and its political patrons).⁴³ 'Deception', of course, is a strong word, and it raises important questions as to how Middleton thought one might actually *practise* rational religion liturgically and devotionally, but the tendency of his thinking is plainly to acquiesce in a rationalised form of Christianity in order to secure public peace. What is more, in reading Middleton's letters, one is confronted with levels of apparent duplicity that leave exactly where he might have placed himself theologically ever more mysterious, as when he thanks Warburton not only for the 'benefit of my Orthodox character', but also for freeing him from

⁴¹ Middleton to Hervey, in BL Add Mss 32, 458, fo. 185.

⁴² Middleton to Hervey, July 27th 1735, in BL Add Mss 32, 458, fo. 185.

⁴³ On which, see Norman Sykes, 'Benjamin Hoadly, Bishop of Bangor', in F. J. C. Hearnshaw ed., *The Social and Political Ideas of some English Thinkers of the Augustan Age A.D. 1650–1750* (London, 1928), 112–56, and Andrew Starkie, *The Church of England and the Bangorian Controversy, 1716–1721* (Woodbridge, 2007).

the 'malicious Censure of adding hypocrisy to irreligion':⁴⁴ the first matter might have merely amused him, but the second accusation, made by orthodox critics, had plainly hurt. Certainly, the blatant heterodoxy of the sort he secretly indulged with the religiously sceptical Hervey was never displayed publicly, and it was in his published writings that like-minded divines found the authentically public voice of Middleton. Hence it was that John Burton could lament Middleton's lack of preferment, as contrasted with the 'Nonsense' and 'Jargon', which 'infected' both the universities and the Church, as this had been promoted by such richly-beneficed 'orthodox' pluralists as Middleton's *bête noire*, Daniel Waterland:

A greater Instance of neglected Merit was never known, than in the Case of this most meritorious Writer. If I am rightly informed, his Salary as principal Librarian [at Cambridge], was no more than fifty Pounds a Year. What he received from a Living, which was not given till a very few Years ago, amounted to much the same Sum.⁴⁵

The rhetoric Middleton deployed in his public writings was, therefore, successful, as well as plausible, and it needs to be taken seriously. Heterodox divines were ever conscious of suffering in personal terms for the truths they defended, and this became a necessary part of their apologetic arsenal.

All of these considerations informed Middleton's public writings, leading him always to insist on the absolute candour of his enquiries:

The reader will find in them none of those arts which are commonly employed by disputants, either to perplex a good cause, or to palliate a bad one; no subtil refinements, forced constructions, or evasive distinctions; but plain reasoning grounded on plain facts, and published with an honest and disinterested view, to free the minds of men from an inveterate imposture, which, through a long succession of ages, has disgraced the religion of the Gospel, and tyrannized over the reason and senses of the Christian world.⁴⁶

A Free Inquiry was thus presented as being at once an intellectually liberated and a spiritually liberating text.

Middleton's claims were primarily historical in nature, as he affirmed that 'Our commerce with the times past, as they are represented to us in

⁴⁴ Middleton to Warburton, October 27th 1739, BL Add Mss 32, 457, fo. 140. Characteristically, in making his case for Middleton's deism, Trevor-Roper scants his correspondence with clerics in favour of that he enjoyed with noblemen.

⁴⁵ [John Burton], *An Attempt Towards the Elogium of Conyers Middleton, D.D.*, (London, 1750), 8–9, 14.

⁴⁶ *A Free Inquiry*, xxxi.

history, is of much the same kind, with our manner of dealing with the present.⁴⁷ The same experiential suspicions that dealt with contemporary credulity applied to historical appraisals of the miraculous in times past. The case he laid out was direct and simple. Leaving aside the miracles of Christ and the Apostles, which he mostly did, Middleton rested his claim on the incredibility of later miracles by emphasising how the Apostolical Fathers, those who had had the last contact with the age of the Apostles, had themselves made no claims to such extraordinary gifts. If, as Middleton insisted to be the case, there had been no miracles for some forty to fifty years after the deaths of the Apostles, why should later writers have insisted on their subsequent revival?⁴⁸ Such miraculous accounts as he encountered were rapidly disposed of. He had great fun with the inability, as reported by Irenaeus, of Theophilus of Antioch to produce those brought back from the dead at the request of Autolychnus, who had felt ready to convert should such people be presented to him. He explained demoniac possession, as encountered by both heathen and Christian exorcists, as cases of epilepsy, and he also detected collusion between ventriloquists and exorcists in other accounts of the phenomenon. Noting that exorcism was only temporarily effective, Middleton took the opportunity to advert to the contrastingly lasting cures that resulted from the miracles performed by Christ and the Apostles.⁴⁹ Concerned to undo the claim that orthodox Christians, who had had their tongues cut out by an Arian persecutor, were miraculously still able to speak, Middleton cited a Parisian doctor who had reported a case of a young girl speaking without a tongue (something which the amateur physician John Wesley threw back at him as being patently absurd).⁵⁰ Ever the classicist, he undid claims to prophetic visions and ecstasies amongst the early Christians by appealing to Cicero's denunciation of the Delphic Pythia and the Cumean Sibyl. Ever ready to deploy a familiar weapon from the freethinking arsenal, he accused Cyprian of alleging divine commands, granted to him in

⁴⁷ *A Free Inquiry*, 216.

⁴⁸ *A Free Inquiry*, 3–25, 62–5.

⁴⁹ *A Free Inquiry*, 71–97.

⁵⁰ *A Free Inquiry*, 182–85. Wesley was forthright on the matter: 'And can you really believe this? That a girl *spoke distinctly and easily*, without any tongue at all? And after avowing this belief, do you gravely talk of other men's credulity? I wonder that such a volunteer in faith should stagger at any thing.' (*A Letter*, p. 76). William Dodwell made an analogous argument on this point in *A Free Answer to Dr Middleton's Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers of the Primitive Church* (London, 1749), 94–9. On Wesley's medical work, see Deborah Madden, 'A Cheap, Safe and Natural Medicine': *Religion, medicine and culture in John Wesley's Primitive Physic* (Amsterdam, 2007).

visions, when he was otherwise unable to gain support for his episcopal authority.⁵¹ Anticipating one of Gibbon's 'natural causes' for the growth of Christianity, Middleton also observed that martyrdom appealed to those in search of glory and repute, to whom the promise of particular rewards in a life to come proved greatly attractive. Yet more controversially, he reminded his readers that some people conventionally considered to be heretics had been martyred, as well as those appraised as orthodox.⁵²

In what he called 'this sceptical age' it was clear to Middleton that history was the true source of knowledge about human nature, and just as he denounced Eusebius for telling a story that was more that of a poet than an historian, the retailing of which 'debases the gravity of History', so even Suetonius and Tacitus were found guilty of giving way to superstition and the taste for the fabulous that had prevailed in their age when chronicling the miracles attributed to the emperor Vespasian. Suetonius and Tacitus, and all other witnesses, were only to be trusted historically regarding events of which they could have been 'competent witnesses': any appeal to the miraculous undid such claims to competency.⁵³ It is not too difficult to draw parallels with Hume's critique of miracles, and, in common with Hume, Middleton repudiated the miracles associated with the Abbé de Paris, citing such recent claims for the continuity of miracles in order to undermine those made for more ancient ones.⁵⁴ His final observation on the role of history in undermining credulity was at one with Hume's contribution to a contentious eighteenth-century debate:

But whatever be the uncertainty of ancient History, there is one thing at least, which we may certainly learn from it; that human nature has always been the same; agitated by the same appetites and passions, and liable to the same excesses and abuses of them, in all ages and countries of the world; so that our experience of what passes in the present age, will be the best comment, on what is delivered to us concerning the past.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *A Free Inquiry*, 97–115.

⁵² *A Free Inquiry*, 201–13. He had alluded to the 'glory' that promised immortality for the generality of Romans in the *Life of Cicero*, iii. 305–07.

⁵³ *A Free Inquiry*, pp. 189, and 127, 169–70. He had earlier used the phrase 'this Sceptical age' in a critical letter addressed to William Innys, an orthodox clergyman and hack journalist, in February 1735: BL Add Mss 32, 457, fo. 112.

⁵⁴ *A Free Inquiry*, 226–29; David Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), 109–31 (Section X, 'Of Miracles').

⁵⁵ *A Free Inquiry*, 230. See R. M. Burns, *The Great Debate on Miracles from Joseph Glanvill to David Hume* (Lewisburg, Penn., 1981), and Shaw, *Miracles in Enlightenment England*.

Modern miracles were patently promoted for self-interested ends, leading one inevitably to conclude that ancient miracles had served similar purposes. With great epistemological condescension, and true Shaftesburian disdain, Middleton emphatically called for a use of reason and judgement 'to raise our minds above the low prejudices, and childish superstition of the credulous vulgar.'⁵⁶

Replies to Middleton were quickly produced, largely by clerics never more keen to reinforce their reputations for orthodoxy, and thus inherently suspect to Middleton and those who accepted his initial premises regarding the self-interest of the would-be orthodox. In his *Life of Cicero*, Middleton had praised the friendship which men committed to widely different philosophies had nevertheless managed to maintain, adverting, by contrast, to the dissensions of Christian 'zealots', ancient and modern, 'who with the light of a most divine and benevolent religion, are perpetually insulting and persecuting their fellow Christians, for differences of opinion, which, for the most part, are merely speculative, and without any influence on life, or the good and happiness of Civil Society.'⁵⁷ He had correctly predicted thereby the response of the orthodox to his enquiries into the miraculous, although this was to be expected from this critic of orthodox interpretations of Biblical prophecy.⁵⁸

Before detailing the responses made by Middleton's orthodox opponents, it is necessary to identify two major elements in their substantive arguments against him. First was their suspicion that something more than a critique of the miracles attested by the Fathers was at stake here: all feared that the miracles of Christ and the Apostles were likewise being subjected to censure, or that it was at least possible for them to be so treated according to the principles of investigation that informed *A Free Inquiry*. Allied to this, naturally, were suspicions that Middleton, wittingly or otherwise, was colluding with freethinkers in undermining the Church, as the Gospel as well as Patristics was thus challenged by 'reason'. Second was the defence of the Fathers themselves, although there was a general feeling that, in accord with Protestant apologetic principles, those of the second and third centuries were infinitely to be preferred to

⁵⁶ *A Free Inquiry*, 231. On which tone, see Lawrence E. Klein, 'Shaftesbury, politeness and the politics of religion' in Phillipson and Skinner, *Political discourse*, 283–301.

⁵⁷ *Life of Cicero*, ii. 174–75.

⁵⁸ Middleton, *An Examination of the Lord Bishop of London's Discourses Concerning the Use and Intent of Prophecy* (London, 1750). This was the last of his heterodox writings to be published in his lifetime.

those of the fourth, particularly as that was the era when the specifically Roman Catholic features of such testimonies were becoming recognisable as such. When Middleton's erstwhile ally, the formidably polemical William Warburton, essayed an orthodox defence of a post-apostolic miracle, in his *Julian* (1751), it was of one on the very cusp of such an acceptable chronology.⁵⁹ The varied reception of that work demonstrates just how problematic a category for Anglicans the miraculous was, and how judiciously chosen, therefore, Middleton's assault on orthodox apologetic had originally been.

As with Middleton, so with his interlocutors, the rhetoric of the controversy is as revealing as is its detailed content. In analysing that rhetoric, it is well also to consider the status of the major combatants in the debate, an indication of how powerfully aligned orthodoxy was (and usually had been) in institutional terms. With the fascinating exception of John Wesley, all were reasonably well-placed within the Church establishment. Two of his most vigorous challengers, William Dodwell and Thomas Church, were to be rewarded with honorary doctorates by the University of Oxford for their labours, whilst one of the most judicious replies was made by a member of Middleton's own university, Zachary Brooke, a young fellow of St John's College, who would eventually become Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. His lengthy English-language rebuttal of Middleton was published by the university press in Cambridge in 1750, two years after the appearance in print of his concentrated Latin refutation of Middleton's *Introductory Discourse*, the product of a university address delivered to students in theology.⁶⁰ This Latin lecture was

⁵⁹ William Warburton, *Julian, or a discourse concerning the earthquake and fiery eruption which defeated that emperor's attempt to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem* (London, 1751). Warburton was distancing himself from Middleton at this point in his controversial career. Fascinatingly, Frederick Toll, an ally of Middleton, also gave his approbation to Warburton's *Julian* in *Some Remarks Upon Mr. Church's Vindication of Miraculous Powers, & c.* (London, 1750), note at p. 52. For broader discussion, see Robert G. Ingram, 'William Warburton, divine action, and Enlightened Christianity' in William Gibson and Robert G. Ingram eds., *Religious Identities in Britain, 1660–1832* (Farnham, 2005), 97–117.

⁶⁰ Zachary Brooke, *Defensio Miraculorum: quae in Ecclesia Christiana facta esse perhibentur post tempora Apostolorum* (Cambridge, 1748). Significantly, it was the only lecture Brooke ever undertook whilst holding the Lady Margaret Chair: on which see, Denys Arthur Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge: a study of certain aspects of the university in the eighteenth century* (Cambridge, 1935), 98. An anonymous ally of Middleton took great pleasure in undoing Brooke's 'declamatory' text, observing, on translating an early passage in the work, that 'The Reader has there seen how it looks in English; and perhaps he will not think that it makes any better Figure in Latin.' (*A View of the Controversy Concerning the Miraculous Powers* [London, 1748], 137–38). Middleton himself had written Latin drafts

a unique instance in the Middletonian controversy of the retreat to the learned tongue in a debate otherwise conducted entirely in the vernacular. It was, of course, no small part of Middleton's achievement (and purpose) that he not only successfully pursued his campaign in the English of which he was an acknowledged master—something Brooke accepted, and the alleged abuse of which he regretted⁶¹—but that he also ensured that his critics responded in English. Purity of diction was fundamental in the contest of heterodoxy and orthodoxy, and Middleton had therefore been reasonably confident that heterodoxy would win.

Such was the conviction regarding the nature of the theological warfare in which all parties in the Middletonian controversy were engaged that a ready resort to militaristic language was frequently made by the combatants themselves. As Brooke had observed, regarding Middleton's strategy of supporting Biblical miracles by attacking those claimed by the early Church and its later apologists:

Such a method of defending Religion, as it appears to me, instead of extinguishing old, must furnish matters of new scandal; must expose the Scripture itself to contempt, give a real triumph to its enemies, and confirm them in their infidelity. For whilst Dr. Middleton is then demolishing the slight outworks, as he I suppose would call them, which make the defence of Religion more difficult; he appears to be in reality betraying the very citadel and yielding up the fortress itself.⁶²

The discourses of war were a common resort of orthodoxy when under assault; as an anonymous critic of Middleton charged, the language of polemical divinity was usually employed by the heterodox to their own ends, though he turned the language of persecution against them as he drew a parallel between his opponent and Louis XIV before drawing on yet another bugbear of orthodoxy:

Would not a man from all this be tempted to suspect, that the Dr may perhaps esteem a state of controversy a state of war; where he is at liberty to use every art and stratagem in his power to get the better of his enemy.

of essays on post-Apostolic miracles and on the gift of tongues: BL Add MSS 32,459, fos. 21–25; 31–45.

⁶¹ Zachary Brooke, *An Examination of Dr. Middleton's Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers of the Primitive Church* (Cambridge, 1750), xiv. A clerical apologist for Middleton, John Burton, was much more positive: 'His Performances in Latin and English, will be lasting Evidence of his being Master of both. By an innate Strength of Genius, he attained to a superior excellency in his Native Language. He could have no Models . . . this Stile was self-formed.' (*Elogium of Conyers Middleton*, 5.)

⁶² Brooke, *An Examination*, xxiii–xxiv.

That, like the late grand monarch, who was a great master of Polemics too in his way, he thinks he ought always to be talking of the sacredness of truth; boasting of his inseparable attachment to it, his inviolable love of it; because this may add credit to his cause, bring over the credulous to his party: but that, upon the principles of Machiavel, he is upon no account whatever to be a sufferer for the sake of it. In short, that truth may be pretended, as a means; but never pursued, as an end. For the end of controversy, according to the established laws of it, is not truth, but victory.⁶³

Another who challenged Middleton in these terms was John Jackson, who declared that if Middleton had sought 'Victory only, he must find himself defeated in a learned Age.'⁶⁴ Yet Jackson was an Arian, and therefore supremely heterodox himself.⁶⁵

Heterodox though Jackson most certainly was, in his defence of the learning of those who defended, on more orthodox grounds, the miracles of the early Church, he was at one with the generality of eighteenth-century divines. Matters of style were fundamental to their critique, as when Zachary Brooke combined Middleton's asperity of tone with his allegedly subversive commitments:

Instead of that humble and charitable disposition, that ingenuous plainness and sincerity, that cool and dispassionate turn of mind, which the nature of

⁶³ Anon., *Remarks on the Controversial Writings of Dr. Middleton* (London, 1751), 31. Tellingly, Middleton's anonymous ally had earlier used the identical simile *against* the orthodox defence of the faith as this was made through appeals to post-Apostolic miracles: 'as if Christianity, instead of being trusted to the *known Impregnability* of its *proper Fortifications*; was like a *Dutch Town*, agreed to be surrender'd to the Enemy, *upon Condition*, That They can destroy but a *single Out-Work*.' (*A View of the Controversy*, 153). Middleton had pioneered use of the image in his 1732 reply to Zachary Pearce's defence of Daniel Waterland: 'For in this age of Scepticism, where Christainity is so vigorously attacked and as it were closely besieged, the true way of defending it, is not to enlarge the compass of its fortifications, and make more helps necessary to its defence, than it can readily furnish, but like skilful Engineers, to demolish its weak outworks, that serve only for shelter and lodgement to the enemy, whence to batter it the more effectually, and draw it within the compass of its firm and natural entrenchments, which will be found in the end impregnable.' Pearce's attack on Middleton was thus turned against him, since 'whilst your zeal for senseless Systems transports you to treat me rudely, for moderating only the extravagant Notions of some of our popular Divines, and demolishing such slight Outworks as make the defence of Religion more difficult, you betray the very Citadel, and yield up the Fortress itself.' (Middleton, *A Defence of the Letter to Dr. Waterland; Against the false and frivolous Cavils of The Author of the Reply* [London, 1732], 3, 71–2.). It was an image that would recur in the language of the Subscription controversy in the 1770s, and a Scripturally-derived instance is to be found in Francis Blackburne, *The Confessional* (3rd edn., 1770), 212–15. Eighteenth-century English Churchmen seemed peculiarly drawn to this characteristically pugnacious metaphor.

⁶⁴ John Jackson, *Remarks on Dr. Middleton's Free Inquiry* (London, 1749), 80.

⁶⁵ On Jackson and his allies, see Maurice Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the centuries* (Oxford, 1996), 79–164.

the thing requires, and Christianity commands; we see scarce any thing but Satyr and Invective, vain glory and confidence, dissimulation and artifice, and all that train of violent and opprobrious reflexion, which the nature of the thing and Christianity abhors.⁶⁶

Middleton was 'but half a Christian.'⁶⁷ Invoking a litany of Middleton's orthodox interlocutors, Brooke regretted that style might yet triumph over substance, as these authors could well ultimately be abandoned 'in the private recesses of a Library; because they are not written with the admired elegance and perspicuity of an Atterbury or a Middleton.'⁶⁸ (Brooke thus subtly calumniated Middleton by associating him with a notorious Jacobite plotter). Similarly, when preaching in the royal chapel at Whitehall a mere two months before Middleton's death, William Parker was certain of the need to contain his influence, since 'he was a writer industrious in his studies; artful in his sophisms; clear and elegant in his stile; entertaining in the manner of his compositions'. It was necessary, therefore, to urge caution on susceptible readers 'inexperienced in the wiles of sophistry.'⁶⁹

Middleton's classicism was, predictably, turned against him, as Brooke observed that 'the fastidious Critic, and the Man of modern taste' infinitely preferred the classics of Greece and Rome to the Fathers, even though they too had displayed their own 'excellencies of composition.'⁷⁰ George White, a country clergyman, spoke for many in regretting Middleton's to him all too typical misapplication of energy, since:

at this Day (I blush to say it, tho' Truth) 'tis a greater Merit to understand Horace or Homer, or to show the *Genuineness* of an Epistle of Cicero (Things comparatively trifling) than to be able to defend the thirty nine Articles of the Church, with all the Divinity that Genius and Application can bestow.⁷¹

More damningly still, John Chapman, a chaplain to the archbishop of Canterbury, opined that Justin Martyr, a favoured subject of Middleton's ire, would have met with better treatment 'in our Times . . . if he had died for his *Virtue*, as a mere *Philosopher*.'⁷² In his reply to Middleton, Thomas

⁶⁶ Brooke, *An Examination*, v.

⁶⁷ Brooke, *An Examination*, vii.

⁶⁸ Brooke, *An Examination*, 438.

⁶⁹ William Parker, *The Mosaick History of the Fall consider'd* (Oxford, 1750), 9. Significantly, the sermon was subsequently preached at Oxford.

⁷⁰ Brooke, *An Examination*, 430, 437.

⁷¹ George White, *Theological Remarks on the Reverend Dr Middleton's late Introductory Discourse and Postscript: with some hints relating to his other works* (London, 1747), 6.

⁷² John Chapman, *A View of the expediency and credibility of miraculous powers among the Primitive Christians, after the decease of the Apostles* (London, 1751), 38. This was a charge given to the clergy of Sudbury, where Chapman served as archdeacon.

Comber, a former fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, tellingly preferred Chrysostom to Cicero, whilst William Parker demanded that Middleton treat Iraneus as fairly as he had earlier treated Cicero.⁷³

Implicit in these criticisms of Middleton's style and intellectual orientation was a suspicion of his motives in attacking the Fathers. Presciently, as Middleton's unpublished letters would come to attest, George White and William Dodwell discerned in his professional disappointment the prime motivating factor behind his turn to heterodoxy.⁷⁴ Suspicions regarding the exact form of that heterodoxy formed a theme in many orthodox replies to *A Free Inquiry*. Whilst Thomas Church, the vicar of Battersea and a prebendary of St Paul's Cathedral, claimed to take to heart Middleton's insistence that he was a sincere Christian, he devastatingly noted that his appeals to the evidence of the natural world in regard to the truth of religion smacked of deism.⁷⁵ (It is a nice irony that Middleton had briefly—and unhappily—held the Woodwardian chair in geology at Cambridge, founded to support evidence for the Mosaic account of the flood).⁷⁶ Likewise, in a superb rhetorical manoeuvre, Zachary Brooke turned one of Middleton's arguments on the usefulness of heathen testimonies against the miracles of the early Church, and thence Middleton's extension of it against three of his interlocutors, damagingly against Middleton himself: 'By the same method of argumentation, the Doctors Stebbing, Berriman, and Chapman, may be proved Papists and Jacobites; and Dr. Middleton himself, an Infidel and Apostate.'⁷⁷ The primary burden of Brooke's refutation, however, was of a piece with such argumentation, as he cited the arguments against miracles of the usual heterodox suspects—Spinoza, Chubb, Hume—alongside those of Middleton.⁷⁸ In much the same manner, he associated Middleton's argument concerning the martyrdoms of the heterodox with the deaths of such early modern heretics as Bruno and Vanini: true martyrdom was the preserve of the orthodox, Christian 'witness' could simply not be made by the heretical.⁷⁹ Brooke had thus

⁷³ Thomas Comber, *An Examination of a late Introductory Discourse* (London, 1747), 42–3; Parker, *The Expediency*, 53–4.

⁷⁴ White, *Theological Remarks*, 8; Dodwell, *A Free Answer*, 4.

⁷⁵ Thomas Church, *A Vindication of the miraculous powers, which subsisted in the three first ages of the Church* (London, 1750), 16–17, 75.

⁷⁶ Joseph M. Levine, *Dr. Woodward's Shield: history, science, and satire in Augustan England* (Berkeley, Ca., 1977), 258, 327. An 'Oratio Woodwardiana' exists in manuscript: BL Add Mss 32,459, fos. 15–20. On Middleton's occupancy of the Chair, the duties of which he 'sedulously neglected', see Winstanley, *Unreformed Cambridge*, 168.

⁷⁷ Brooke, *An Examination*, 139.

⁷⁸ Brooke, *An Examination*, 1, 49–50, 87, 244.

⁷⁹ Brooke, *An Examination*, 31.

seen off, at least to his satisfaction, one of Middleton's most subversive arguments regarding the supposedly miraculous history of orthodoxy.⁸⁰

Guilt by association was Brooke's preferred method of theological indictment. Interestingly, however, other thinkers now considered heterodox were not thought to be so by Brooke. He described Bayle as a consistent Protestant, and, repudiating Middleton's interpretation of Locke, Brooke consistently appealed to the philosopher as a defender of the miraculous, circumspect though Locke had been about the early cessation of miracles.⁸¹ The heterodoxy modern historians identify in such thinkers was still sometimes oblique to scholars of Brooke's generation, and the genealogies of heterodoxy that inform much modern scholarship were not always so readily discernible to the orthodox in the eighteenth century.

As was to be expected, John Wesley was yet more explicitly forthright in his condemnation of Middleton's argument. To Wesley, Middleton was no less than a persecutor of Jesus, and his laboured objections to the rite of exorcism went directly against Christ's promise that '*In my name hath they cast out devils: whereby (to make sure work) you strike at him and his apostles, just as much as at the primitive fathers.*'⁸² Wesley had quickly produced a judiciously argued rebuttal of the entirety of *A Free Inquiry* in 1749, but his was a text that Middleton refused even to acknowledge when replying to his critics. Refuting an 'enthusiast' plainly did not appeal to a scholar who had dismissed the Stoics as 'enthusiasts' in his *Life of Cicero*, and who identified Methodists, Moravians, and French Prophets as '*modern Fanatics*' in *A Free Inquiry*.⁸³ Wesley's reply to Middleton was predicated on an apologetic strategy that was at least as firmly grounded in Scripture and experience as was that of his opponent, albeit theirs were very different understandings of those constituent elements of conventional Anglican apologetic. Whilst altogether less problematic for Wesley than for Middleton, tradition was nonetheless subsidiary in his conception of Christian orthodoxy. In this way, and not for the first or the last time in eighteenth-century England, Enlightenment and 'Enthusiasm' overlapped more than one might otherwise suspect.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Importantly, John Burton insisted that 'What [Middleton] has said on the subject of Martyrdom is not the least sagacious, and is perhaps the most instructive of any Thing in the whole Work.' (*Elogium of Conyers Middleton*, 11).

⁸¹ Brooke, *An Examination*, 4–5, 413–14, 416–17.

⁸² Wesley, *A Letter*, 28, 60.

⁸³ *Life of Cicero*, iii. 360–62; *A Free Inquiry*, 197.

⁸⁴ For a parallel experience involving John Jackson, see Brian Young, 'Newtonianism and the enthusiasm of Enlightenment', *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 35 (2004), 645–63. For a valuable discussion of the temperaments at issue here, see

In closing this account of the rebuttals made by Middleton's orthodox interlocutors, it is well to observe that, in laying the foundations of a secularisation of history through his attempt to invalidate the testimonies to the miraculous of the early Church Fathers, he was, to their minds, effectively setting up 'a universal scepticism in history.'⁸⁵ Not for nothing had Thomas Church insisted that this was an historical controversy, and not a philosophical argument.⁸⁶

In identifying, therefore, Middleton's major contribution to eighteenth-century heterodoxy as the effective secularisation of the hitherto sacred history of the post-Apostolic history of the early Church, it is well to see yet again how complicated this actually is, not least by reference to Middleton's characteristically self-conscious Protestantism. Here appeal has to be made to his private correspondence, but not in this instance with a noble and religiously sceptical lord, but to a self-exculpatory draft of a letter to a critical archbishop of Canterbury, to whom Middleton had hoped to explain, between 1741 and 1742, that his writings against Daniel Waterland had been made according to a 'distinction in my own mind, between our religion itself, & the history or tradition of it, by which it has been handed down to us.' He elaborated his point in a manner that pointed up the contrast between tradition-orientated orthodoxy, and Scripturally-secured Protestantism that would shortly recur in both the *Introductory Discourse* and *A Free Inquiry*:

I look upon our religion, as a wonderful scheme of the divine wisdom & goodness, proposed & revealed in a marvellous manner, & at different times, as the experiences of men required, from the beginning of the world, to the coming of Christ in order to secure to us that happiness, for which we were originally created, by making it the true road to it.⁸⁷

For once, Middleton's Christianity was perhaps more explicit in his private correspondence (whatever the particular circumstances behind this instance) than it was in his published writings, but there can be no doubt that this is how he had expected them to be read by many of his more

J. G. A. Pocock, 'Enthusiasm: the antiself of Enlightenment' in Lawrence E. Klein and Anthony J. La Vopa eds., *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650–1850* (San Marino, Ca., 1998), 1–28.

⁸⁵ Comber, *An Examination*, 10; Dodwell, *A Free Answer*, 126–27; Brooke, *An Examination*, xix–xx, 217, 451.

⁸⁶ Church, *A Vindication*, 57.

⁸⁷ Middleton to the archbishop of Canterbury, regarding a conference between them, composed between September 1740 and September 1741: BL Add Mss 32, 457 fo. 153.

pious readers. This is confirmed by a similarly troubled letter sent to his Cambridge contemporary, the then bishop of Ely, regarding his severely under-appreciated gift to the prelate of a presentation copy of *A Free Inquiry*:

The chief end of my writings is, not to please only, but to convince; & my subjects are chosen with that view, as proper to instruct, rather than entertain, by recommending some important truth, or exposing some prevailing error; if I find therefore in this point, I quite miss my aim, & can claim no other praise, as a writer than what is due to the integrity of my intention.⁸⁸

The relationship between sacred Scripture and the historical evolution of the Church had been central to Protestant thinking in England since Chillingworth, and it was important to Gibbon's strategic self-identification when confronting his clerical critics.⁸⁹ If as even his closest students admit, it is difficult to disentangle Gibbon's actual religious sentiments from the detail of chapters fifteen and sixteen in the *Decline and Fall*, which cover the territory initially surveyed by Middleton, then it manifestly cannot be any easier to do the same for Middleton, although one important element that the two authors have in common was in their choosing to emphasise post-Apostolic rather than Gospel miracles.⁹⁰ That their attentive readers, both secular and religious, could have made a purely secular reading of both Middleton and Gibbon is, however, the truly significant point, and this is exactly what orthodox readers had presumed to lay behind their appeal to history. Once again, it is a considerable strength of Middleton's superbly deployed *persona* as a sincerely Protestant writer that this subtly crafted consequence was so effectively achieved.

Not that the secularisation of history necessarily compromised the history of religion when understood religiously. In his reply to the *Introductory*

⁸⁸ Middleton to the bishop of Ely, February 7th 1749, BL Add Mss 32,457, fos. 175–78.

⁸⁹ On the satisfyingly complicated filiations of this intellectual ancestry, see Joseph M. Levine, 'From Tradition to History: Chillingworth to Gibbon', in Anthony T. Grafton and J. H. M. Salmon eds., *Historians and Ideologues: essays in honor of Donald R. Kelley* (Rochester, NY, 2001), 181–210. See also Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman* (Cambridge, 1957), 75–6, 219–20, 223, an interpretation of *A Free Inquiry* which takes Middleton's professed Protestantism suitably seriously, albeit this reading was not at all to Trevor-Roper's taste.

⁹⁰ See J. G. A. Pocock, 'Gibbon and the primitive Church' and David Womersley, 'Gibbon's religious characters', in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young eds., *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 2000), 48–68, 69–88. For a more discursive treatment of Middleton in this regard, see B. W. Young, 'Preludes and postludes to Gibbon: variations on an impromptu by J. G. A. Pocock, *History of European Ideas* 35 (2009), 418–32.

Discourse, the practised controversialist Henry Stebbing had wondered what history could survive the standards Middleton had set in his attack on the Fathers, observing rhetorically: 'Do not all Histories abound with the Superstitions of the Times in which they were written, which yet, for the *principal* matters they contain, are not the worse thought of?'⁹¹ Scepticism about the authority of historical texts was not unique to the heterodox or to freethinkers, though the qualifications regarding the nature and degree of that scepticism necessarily differed between apologetic parties. There is more than one narrative in the evolution of history writing over the eighteenth century, and not all roads led ineluctably to Gibbon.

Indeed, John Jortin was largely of like mind with Middleton in seeking to undo the historical authority of the Church Fathers, but he was much more circumspect in leaving providence its role in ecclesiastical history. He had learned from Middleton, but also knew to keep his distance from such a tainted influence. As a result of this, one of Middleton's defenders, Richard Moseley, expressly chided Jortin for suggesting, in his otherwise remarkably liberal *Remarks on Ecclesiastical History*, that Middleton might just about be allowed to have been a sincere Christian, albeit one very much after his own fashion.⁹² It is with the direct consequences of this disputed matter that the essay will now conclude.

III

In his posthumously published *Vindication of the Free Inquiry*, Middleton had noted that he had deliberately not discussed this work in conversation with his clerical friends:

lest the suspicion of any communication with me, might hurt their fame or fortunes, and expose them to the same envy, which I myself have incurred.

⁹¹ Henry Stebbing, *Observations on a Book, intituled, An Introductory Discourse to a larger Work, & c. Containing an Answer To the Author's Prejudices, that Miraculous Powers were not continued in the Church after the Days of the Apostles* (London, 1747), 32–3. Stebbing also attacked in print both John Jackson and John Wesley, two of Middleton's critics, testimony yet again to the wide church which opposed his heterodoxy. Stebbing extended the attack on Middleton, significantly, in a work dedicated to undoing deism: *Christianity Justified upon the Scripture foundation, a summary view of the controversy between Christians and deists* (London, 1750).

⁹² John Jortin, *Remarks on Ecclesiastical History* (5 vols, London, 1751–73), ii. 64; Richard Moseley, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. John Jortin, in Vindication of the late Dr. Middleton from the Charge of Infidelity* appended to *A Letter to the Bishop of Oxford* (London, 1752), 24–32.

For heterodox opinions in the Church, like treasonable words in the State, impart a guilt even in the hearer, and make him an accomplice in the crime, unless he purge himself by a discovery, and impeachment of the author.⁹³

In the process of writing himself out of orthodoxy, Middleton had become self-consciously heterodox, and it was something he was happy to detail in conversation and private correspondence with friends such as Lord Hervey and Lord Bolingbroke. When this was later publicised, his image amongst some of his clerical friends as a consistent, if radical, Protestant was severely diminished.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, in appraising the purpose and achievement of Middleton's work, especially *A Free Inquiry*, it is important to realise that such apologies on his behalf had indeed occurred.

Frederick Toll, a Hampshire clergyman with a taste for defending heterodoxy, openly earned Middleton's approbation for his selfless defences of a by then unpopular cause, particularly through his critique of Dodwell and Church.⁹⁵ Toll energetically and appropriately denounced the alleged authority of the two Oxford honorands in the style of Middleton's critique of post-apostolic testimonies to the miraculous:

I will proceed so far as to say (whether offensive or not, I don't much trouble my Head) that were Dr. Dodwell, Dr. Church, and twenty other of the most eminent Doctors in this Nation to declare before me in general Terms, that they had seen five hundred Miracles, I should not think myself obliged to confide entirely in their Word, unless they separated some one from the rest, and gave such a minute Description of it, as to satisfy my Reason, it could not have happened, but by a Power immediately derived from Heaven.⁹⁶

⁹³ Middleton, *A Vindication of the Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers* (London, 1751), 1–2.

⁹⁴ See in particular, Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, v. 405–23; Alexander Chalmers, *General Biographical Dictionary* xxii (London, 1815), 131–45; and appendices 1 and 2 to W. S. Lewis ed., *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, xv (New Haven, Conn., 1951), 291–315.

⁹⁵ Middleton, *A Vindication*, p. 4; Frederick Toll, *A Defence of Dr. Middleton's Free Enquiry, Against Mr. Dodwell's Free Answer* (London, 1749), and *Some Remarks Upon Mr. Church's Vindication*.

⁹⁶ Toll, appendix to *A Sermon Preached at the Visitation at Basingstoke, before the Revd. Robert Lowth, M.A., Archdeacon of Winchester, On Tuesday, May the 14th, 1751* (London, 1751), 70. In the wake of Middleton's death, Toll grew yet more markedly heterodox. A passage in his response to attacks made by the orthodox on the Arian Robert Clayton, bishop of Clogher, in which he rejected the Augustinian doctrine of original sin, epitomises the advances in rational Christianity that Middleton's Anglican admirers attributed to him: 'O Austin, if ever I dignified thee with the Title of Saint, I retract the Word, thou hard and unmerciful Bishop of Hippo! But the grand and distinguishing Marks of Orthodoxy were found upon thee, and this raised thee to *Sainthood*. To say no more; the doctrine of *original Sin*... does so radically subvert all our Natural Notions of Right and Wrong, Justice and Injustice, that, in my Apprehension, no Miracles can prove the Divinity of that

As for the familiar accusation that Middleton had undermined the 'Faith of all History', Toll had only two words in reply: 'Ridiculous Outcry!'⁹⁷ This was strong stuff, and vivid testimony to the liberation for rational Christians that *A Free Inquiry* had so effectively announced. It was in this spirit that, in his *éloge* for Middleton, John Burton had judiciously turned the tables on his subject's orthodox opponents:

The excellent and immortal *Free Enquiry* and *Introductory Discourse*, have been branded and loaded with the most invidious Reflections and partial Prejudices. Affectation of Simplicity, Enmity to revealed Religion, to venerable Martyrs, and primitive Christianity, have been the proclaimed Instruments to this Undertaking. Such is the Usage which the ablest and most consistent Advocate for Protestantism, has received from Great Prelates and Great Divines, who call themselves Protestants.⁹⁸

When Ralph Heathcote, a Cambridge-educated clergyman and a member of Jortin's literary circle in London, produced as his first major work in English, *Cursory Animadversions upon a late controversy concerning the miraculous powers*, he took the opportunity to denounce polemical divinity as the source of persecution and an abuse of learning, Insisting, with Middleton, that his was the religion of Chillingworth, a faith in the religion of the Bible alone, Heathcote centrally turned one of the core arguments of Middleton's orthodox opponents against them, observing that 'Tis become perfectly modish among Divines, to season their Polemick Writings with Satyr and Invective':⁹⁹ rational religion, heterodoxy to its opponents, once again claimed the authority of a pure style for its own. Of the utmost importance for Heathcote, was the fact that Middleton had championed the cause of rational religion over that of 'superstition', and here Christian heterodoxy is plainly questioning the presumed right of Anglican orthodoxy to identify itself as the one true faith.¹⁰⁰

Whatever the suspicions of the orthodox, then, for some clergy and laity the Middleton who had produced so public a theological dispute was pre-eminently a rational Christian, still recognisably the advanced Erasmian of the *Life of Cicero*. It is worth asking why it was that the

Revelation... I thank God, the Christian is clear of it.' (*A Plain and Proper Answer to this Question, Why does not the Bishop of Clogher, supposing him to be the Author of the Essay on Spirit, resign his Preferments?* [London, 1753], 38).

⁹⁷ Toll, *Some Remarks Upon Mr. Church's Vindication*, 50.

⁹⁸ Burton, *Elogium of Conyers Middleton*, 8.

⁹⁹ Ralph Heathcote, *Cursory Animadversions upon a late controversy concerning the miraculous powers* (London, 1752), vi, and passim.

¹⁰⁰ Heathcote, *Cursory Animadversions*, xvi.

freethinking Middleton remained for so long a private matter, and what exactly Middleton himself thought that the apparent gap between his public and private writings actually constituted. Was he quite so consistently an exponent of classic double doctrine theory and practice as this would seem to imply, or, as this essay has argued, is the reality not more complicated, as the distance between rational Christianity and freethinking was more readily negotiated than one might otherwise suspect if wedded to a purely dichotomous reading of intellectual history? Fundamental to any resolution of this conundrum is the classic Hobbesian problem of ever being able to be absolutely certain as to what exactly anyone actually believes, as opposed to what they might outwardly profess to believe. Why, after all, should one privilege 'private' testimony over public when assessing Middleton's religion? There is an undeniable tension at work here, to which this essay offers one possible resolution. However this may be, it is certain that for heterodox writers who wrote after Locke, it was no longer true to say with him that 'every Church is orthodox to it self': heterodoxy had itself become an identity, both amongst rational Christians and freethinkers.¹⁰¹ Middleton formed a radical link between both groups, and it is in this connection, as much as in the problematic coherence of his own beliefs, that his significance lies for the historian of heterodoxy.

¹⁰¹ Thus it was that Middleton could write to his physician friend, William Heberden, in April 1749, calmly stating that, 'I shall now reserve to a personal conference, & open to you perhaps at the same time, in our old free manner, what new heterodoxies I had been meditating and sketching out in this interval of your absence.' (BL Add Mss 32, 457, fo. 184).

DAVID HUME'S *NATURAL HISTORY OF RELIGION* (1757)
AND THE END OF MODERN EUSEBIANISM

Richard Serjeantson*

One of the most consequential developments in post-Reformation European history is the shift away from a view which saw 'religion' exclusively in terms of 'true' or 'Christian religion', towards one which—however unwillingly—saw Christianity as just one religion among many.¹ Arising from the countervailing forces of confessionalisation and heterodoxy, this shift in turn allowed for what might be called the naturalisation of religion: its treatment as a natural phenomenon, something that might be known without the assistance of Revelation.

The most prominent manifestation of this naturalism is the investigation by numerous authors—both orthodox and heterodox in intent—of what came to be called 'natural religion'; that is, the use of reason to establish the existence, attributes, and perhaps also the commands, of God.² A second strand of inquiry, however, came to consider religion not in terms of the being and attributes of a deity, but as something that arose from what was increasingly understood in terms of 'human nature'.³ Its protagonists set out to identify what they called the 'natural seeds' of religion and they wrote something they termed its 'natural history'. This historical strand of religious naturalism is less prominent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than the philosophical investigation of 'natural

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¹ See further John Bossy, 'Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim', *Past and Present*, 95 (1982), 3–18, at 4–8; also Peter Harrison, *Religion and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1990), esp. 1–2.

² But on the vexed definition of 'natural religion' in this period, see further D. A. Pailin, 'The Confused and Confusing Story of Natural Religion', *Religion*, 24 (1994), 199–212; and Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: A study of the language of religion and ethics in England 1660–1780*, 2 vols, (Cambridge, 1991–2000), vol. II, 9.

³ On the science of 'human nature' in the eighteenth century, see further Roger Smith, 'The Language of Human Nature', in *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth Century Domains*, ed. C. Fox, R. Porter and R. Wokler (Berkeley, 1995), 88–111; Aaron Garrett, 'Human Nature', in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, 2 vols, ed. K. Haakonssen (Cambridge, 2006), vol. I, 160–233.

religion'. In the hands of its exponents it also tended to be less orthodox in intent. Yet, perhaps for this reason, its implications may be even more far-reaching.

David Hume (1711–1776) contributed to both these forms of naturalistic inquiry into religion.⁴ Firstly, in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (first drafted c. 1749; published posthumously in 1779) Hume treated, with raillery and artificial malice, 'the subject of NATURAL RELIGION'.⁵ Secondly, in his *Four Dissertations*—first published, after some difficulties,⁶ in 1757—Hume included a treatise he called the *Natural History of Religion*, which took as its goal the investigation of religion's 'origin in human nature'.⁷

The *Natural History of Religion* begins with the assertion that 'polytheism and idolatry was, and necessarily must have been, the first and most antient religion of mankind'.⁸ It goes on to offer a series of learned, droll, and rather idiosyncratic reflections on the nature of religious belief and practice, from the most ancient times onwards. The first edition of this dissertation, and the nature of the history it tells, forms the focus of the present chapter. In particular, I wish to raise two questions about it. The first question concerns the significance of Hume's treatment of very ancient religions, and especially that of ancient Egypt. The second and larger question arises from the answer I offer to the first: who are Hume's principal targets in the *Natural History*?

But before turning to answer these two questions I have some more general arguments to make about the investigation of religion as a natural and very human phenomenon in the later-seventeenth and earlier-eighteenth centuries. How did this perilous tendency arise? And why was it so closely associated with more orthodox scholarly investigations into the origins of idolatry?

⁴ On this point see further the suggestive comments of Arnaldo Momigliano, 'Heterogeneity of Religion: Western views', in *On Pagans, Jews and Christians* (Middleton, CT, 1987), 11–30, at 12; also Winfried Schröder, *Ursprünge des Atheismus: Untersuchungen zur Metaphysik- und Religionskritik des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1998), 225.

⁵ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* ([London?], 1779), 3. The implication of Paul Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion* (Oxford, 2008), esp. 267–78, is perhaps that we should also consider Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, 3 vols (London, 1739–40) in this light.

⁶ Ernest Campbell Mossner, 'Hume's *Four Dissertations*: An essay in biography and bibliography', *Modern Philology*, 48 (1950), 37–57, at 44.

⁷ David Hume, *Natural History of Religion*, in *Four Dissertations* (London, 1757), 1 (Introduction). All references to the *Natural History* are from this first edition unless otherwise specified.

⁸ Hume, *Natural History*, 3 (§1).

I

Hume declares in section XIII of the *Natural History of Religion* that 'The primary religion of mankind arises chiefly from an anxious fear of future events',⁹ and interpreters interested in Hume's dissertation who have gone beyond simply trying to relate it to the *Treatise*, the second *Enquiry*, or the *Dialogues*, have established a plausible canon of works in the century preceding its publication that share its concern with making this kind of argument about the natural causes of religion.¹⁰ These works tend to develop a more or less Epicurean analysis of the sort that is prominent in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, one which stresses the origins of the religious impulse in human ignorance and in the human passions—above all the passion of fear.¹¹ This thought animates the treatment of the 'natural seeds' of religion in chapter XII of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651);¹² it is prominent in Baruch Spinoza's *Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus* (1670);¹³ and it is also strongly developed in John Trenchard's *Natural History of Superstition* (1709).¹⁴ The passion of fear, together with ignorance, is also important for David Hume's account of superstition (though not enthusiasm) in his early essay 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm' (1741).¹⁵

⁹ Hume, *Natural History*, 94 (§XII); the ground for this summary is laid in 12–15 (§II).

¹⁰ Harrison, *Religion*, 130–72; Tom L. Beauchamp, 'The Intellectual Background: A concise account, with bibliography', in David Hume, *A Dissertation on the Passions [and] The Natural History of Religion: A critical edition*, ed. Beauchamp (Oxford, 2007), 215–28; Paul Russell, 'Hume on Religion', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume-religion>, accessed 9 Jan. 2009), §8. Mr Robin Mills has pointed out to me that the fifth dialogue of Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees, Part II* (London, 1729) and the first dialogue of his *Enquiry into the Origin of Honour* (London, 1732), should be added to this canon.

¹¹ The claim of R. A. Segal, 'Hume's *Natural History of Religion* and the Beginning of the Social Scientific Study of Religion', *Religion*, 24 (1994), 225–34, that the 'true originality' (p. 225) of Hume's *Natural History* lies in its assertion that religion stems 'not from intellect but from passion' is therefore rather misleading.

¹² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London, 1651), esp. 52 (ch. XII). See generally Alan Cromartie, 'The God of Thomas Hobbes', *Historical Journal*, 51 (2008), 857–79 (esp. 874–75).

¹³ Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus* ('Hamburg' [i.e. Amsterdam], 1670), sig. (*)²-v (*Præfatio*): 'Causa itaque à quâ superstitio oritur, conservatur & fovetur, metus est.'

¹⁴ [John Trenchard], *The Natural History of Superstition* (London, 1709), 8, 9.

¹⁵ David Hume, *Essays, Moral and Political* (Edinburgh, 1741), 142, 143. On the significance of Hume's diametrical discussion of superstition and enthusiasm, see Mikko Tolonen, 'Self-Love and Self-Liking in the Political Philosophy of Bernard Mandeville and David Hume' (Ph.D. diss., University of Helsinki, 2009), 366.

Yet it would be quite misleading to suppose that this naturalistic understanding of religion was born spontaneously from the heads of this crew of infidels. By the middle of the seventeenth century an orthodox tradition had emerged that was also interested in just this matter. This tradition was above all one of Christian apologetic: the defence of true, and particularly Protestant, Christianity against pagan, and by extension Roman Catholic, idolatry.¹⁶ In the Protestant republic of letters in the seventeenth century one author in particular stood at the source of this intellectual scene: Gerardus Johannes Vossius (1577–1649), and his book *Pagan Theology, or the Origin and Progress of Idolatry* (1641), published together with his son Dionysius' seminal translation of the section of Moses Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* on idolatry. Unlike the infidels, G. J. Vossius was sure that the 'instigations of Satan' were particularly to blame for pagan idolatry, and that it was Satan, and his rebel angels, who provided the principal objects of *idololatria*. But Vossius was also concerned with those causes of idolatry which, as he put it, 'belonged to human beings'; and, no less than Hobbes or Hume, this pious Remonstrant assigned the chief cause of false religion to 'human ignorance'.¹⁷

Heterodox investigations of the natural origins of religion, that is to say, had their own origins in the orthodox investigation of the origins of idolatry. This observation helps explain why pagan religion, and particularly the question of the origins of polytheism and idolatry, are so prominent in the heterodox writings of authors interested in the natural causes of religion. The treatises explicitly on the subject of the origins of idolatry by the freethinkers Charles Blount (1654–1693) and John Toland (1670–1722) are the most obvious instances of this phenomenon,¹⁸ but from Hobbes onwards all the infidels deploy, to a greater or lesser extent, findings from

¹⁶ See in general Martin Mulsow, 'Antiquarianism and Idolatry: The *historia* of religions in the seventeenth century', in *Historia: Empiricism and Erudition in Early Modern Europe*, ed. G. Pomata and N. G. Siraisi (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 181–210, esp. 195–97; and the valuable overview by Francis Schmidt, 'Polytheism: Degeneration or progress?' *History and Anthropology*, 3 (1987), 9–60, esp. 14–21 (an expansion of Schmidt's 'Naissance des Polytheismes (1624–1757)', *Archives des sciences sociales des religions*, 59 (1985), 77–90).

¹⁷ G. J. Vossius, *De theologia gentili, et physiologia christiana sive de origine ac progressu idololatriæ, ad veterum gesta, ac rerum naturam, reductæ* [with] Moses Maimonides, *De idololatria liber*, trans. Dionysius Vossius, 3 vols (Amsterdam, 1641), vol. I, 22: 'Causæ idololatriæ sunt variæ. Non jam reponam, quæ de instinctu Satanæ superius diximus: continebo me intra illas, quæ hominibus insunt. Quarum prima est inscitia humana.'

¹⁸ Charles Blount, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians: Or, the Original of Idolatry, together with the Politick Institution of the Gentile Sacrifices* (London, 1680; repr. 1695, 1700). John Toland, 'The Origin of Idolatry, and Reasons of Heathenism', in *Letters to Serena* (London, 1704), 69–130 (Letter III).

the orthodox investigation of idolatry. (Trenchard's *Natural History of Superstition* is something of an exception here, since the issue of idolatry only arises fleetingly and in subordination to his larger argument about the origin of superstition in the human temperament and passions.)¹⁹ We might even go so far as to suggest that the orthodox tradition of investigation into the origins of pagan idolatry contained within itself the seeds of its own destruction. The answers it offered, after all, quickly became double-edged. If the origin of false religion could be explained in terms of tendencies in human nature, might not ultimately even true religion—Christianity—itself succumb to such a critique? This was a process that played itself out over the course of the century following the publication of Vossius' book.

So much for its origins in human nature; how did idolatry enter human history? In the middle decades of the seventeenth century, one kind of answer to this question came to seem particularly important. Vossius was again one of its earliest and leading exponents. He and his successors made the case that not only pagan religion but also pagan philosophy should be seen as a corruption of purer originals: Hebrew originals.²⁰ In the hands of subsequent scholars such as Samuel Bochart (*Geographia Sacra*, 1646), Edward Stillingfleet (*Origines Sacrae*, 1662), Theophilus Gale (*The Court of the Gentiles*, 1667–1678), Ralph Cudworth (*The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, 1678), and Pierre-Daniel Huet (*Demonstratio Evangelica*, 1679), this Hebraic thesis received detailed articulation.²¹ These authors developed, at loving and sometimes laborious length, a range of perspectives on the thesis that traces of revealed truth might be discerned in pagan antiquity; and, in particular, that in the cultures of ancient Greece and Egypt it was possible to find concealed or corrupted traces of their Hebrew origins.²²

¹⁹ [Trenchard], *Natural History of Superstition*, 48. It follows that Hume's own *Natural History* is not quite 'devoted to the same topic as Trenchard's' (Harrison, *Religion*, 169).

²⁰ On this point, see also Momigliano, 'Historiography of Religion', 24; Harrison, *Religion*, 137; and Jonathan Sheehan, 'Sacred and Profane: Idolatry, antiquarianism and the polemics of distinction in the seventeenth century', *Past and Present*, 192 (2006), 35–66, at 51–60; Sheehan, 'The Altars of the Idols: Religion, Sacrifice, and the Early Modern Polity', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67 (2006), 649–74.

²¹ See generally Peter N. Miller, 'Taking Paganism Seriously: Anthropology and antiquarianism in early seventeenth-century histories of religion', *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*, 3 (2001), 183–209.

²² See further Anthony Grafton, 'Barrow as a Scholar', in *Before Newton: The life and times of Isaac Barrow*, ed. M. Feingold (Cambridge, 1990), 291–302; Richard Serjeantson, 'Introduction', to Meric Casaubon, *Generall Learning: A seventeenth-century treatise on the*

The thesis of the Hebrew origins of classical antiquity was not, however, one that seventeenth-century scholars can be said to have discovered for themselves. It had first been adumbrated by the Christians of late antiquity, and above all by Eusebius of Caesarea, whose *Preparation for the Gospel* had asserted the priority of Hebrew culture, and by extension also Christianity, to that of paganism. This Eusebian filiation was well known in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Huet took the title of his own book—*Demonstratio Evangelica*—directly from Eusebius.²³ John Toland acknowledged the same in his anti-Huetian *Origins of the Jews* (1709).²⁴ But one of the most penetrating assessments of this neo-Eusebianism came from the posthumous pen of Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke (1678–1751):

EUSEBIUS took much pains, and used much art, I might say artifice, to spread an opinion that this knowledge and all good theology were derived from the Jews, and from their scriptures; nay that the philology and philosophy of the whole learned world were purloined from thence, and the heathen were plagiarists, who lighted their candles at the fire of the sanctuary; as some modern EUSEBIUS or other, GALE, I think, expresses himself.²⁵

Elsewhere Bolingbroke cynically suggested that by the ‘ridiculous pains’ of such modern scholars as ‘BOCHART, HUET, STILLINGFLEET’, ‘it will not be difficult to make antiquity depose just as we please.’²⁶ We may perhaps be justified, therefore, in speaking of a seventeenth-century tradition of ‘modern Eusebianism’; and we might also ask what role it plays in more

formation of the general scholar (Cambridge, 1999), 1–65, at 47–51; Richard H. Popkin, ‘The Crisis of Polytheism and the Answers of Vossius, Cudworth and Newton’, in *Essays on the Context, Nature and Influence of Isaac Newton’s Theology*, ed. J. E. Force and R. H. Popkin (Dordrecht, 1990), 9–25.

²³ See further D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries* (Ithaca, NY, 1972), 194–230; April Shelford, ‘Thinking Geometrically in Pierre-Daniel Huet’s *Demonstratio Evangelica* (1679)’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 63 (2002), 599–618; and Shelford, *Transforming the Republic of Letters: Pierre-Daniel Huet and European Intellectual Life, 1650–1720* (Rochester, NY, 2007), esp. 153, 158.

²⁴ See John Toland, ‘Origines Judaicae sive, Strabonis, de Moyse et religione Judaica historia, breviter illustrata’, in *Adeisidaemon* (The Hague, 1709), esp. 109: ‘in *Praeparatione & Demonstratione Evangelica* Eusebii, qui Philosophorum & Poetarum loca de mundo Pantheistico, pro Dei unius existentia aut perfectione allegare ubivis solet’.

²⁵ Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, ‘Essay the Third: Containing some further reflections on the rise and progress of monotheism’, in *The Philosophical Works*, ed. David Mallet, 5 vols, 8° (London, 1754), vol. II, 158–238, at 157–58.

²⁶ Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, ‘Essay the Second: Containing some reflections on the folly and presumption of philosophers, especially in matters of the First Philosophy’ in *The Philosophical Works*, vol. I, 276–358, continued in vol. II, 1–157 (quotation from vol. I, 289).

heterodox inquiries into the natural history of religion in the eighteenth century.

II

The fundamental manifestation of the Hebraising thesis turned upon the relations between Hebrew and Greek antiquity. Here was encountered the figure of Plato as 'Moses Atticus': a virtuous pagan and a 'more than human' figure who possessed religious knowledge derived from the well-head of Hebrew truth.²⁷ Here too was met the obscure Sidonian atomistic philosopher Moschus, whom Ralph Cudworth now proclaimed to be 'no other than the Celebrated *Moses* of the *Jews*'.²⁸ But the place of Egypt was also a question. What were the relations between Hebrew and Egyptian antiquity? The straightforward answer, and the one most obviously compatible with the Mosaic history of the Pentateuch, was that Egyptian polytheism was a corruption of a pure Abrahamic monotheism. This was a view that had originally been encouraged by the forgeries of the Hermetic corpus, and it took a very long time to die even after Isaac Casaubon's redating of these texts to the early Christian era in 1614.²⁹

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, however, a different account of the relations between Hebrew and Egyptian antiquity began to emerge. Unusually for serious early-modern scholarship on the ancient world, this new account was associated above all with the work of two scholars from England. One was Sir John Marsham (1602–1685) in *Cronica Canon* (1672), a chronology of Egyptian, Hebrew, and Greek antiquity.³⁰

²⁷ Sarah Hutton, 'Edward Stillingfleet, Henry More, and the decline of *Moses Atticus*: a note on seventeenth-century Anglican apologetics', in *Philosophy, Science and Religion in England 1640–1700*, ed. R. Kroll, R. Ashcraft and P. Zagorin (Cambridge, 1992), 68–84, at 69.

²⁸ Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London, 1678), 12 (1. 10). See also Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* [c. 1664; publ. 1731], ed. Sarah Hutton (Cambridge, 1996), 39 (IV. 2).

²⁹ On this point, see Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, esp. 1–3, 7–21; Anthony Grafton, 'The Strange Death of Hermes and the Sibyls', in *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), 162–77; Harrison, *Religion*, 136–37. On Casaubon's redating of the Hermetic corpus, see Anthony Grafton, 'Protestant versus Prophet: Isaac Casaubon on Hermes Trismegistus', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 46 (1983), 78–93.

³⁰ Sir John Marsham, *Chronica Canon Aegyptiacus, Ebraicus, Graecus & disquisitiones* (London, 1672), 136–217, and esp. 149. An earlier impression of 1666 perished in the Great Fire (British Library, shelfmark C. 133.g.3, MS note at p. 280). On the character of Marsham's book, see further John Gascoigne, '“The Wisdom of the Egyptians” and the Secularisation

The other was John Spencer (1630–1693), first in his dissertation *On Urim and Thummim* (1669), and then much more elaborately in his account of Jewish ceremonies, *On the Ritual Laws of the Hebrews* (1685).³¹ In these books Eusebius, and the testimonies he provided about Egypt from the anti-Christian neo-platonist philosopher Porphyry, remained an important source. But the writings of both of these English authors suggested that rather than Hebrew religion having been transmitted to the Egyptians, it was the Egyptians who had imparted their religious customs to the Hebrews during their captivity.³²

In the light of the neo-Eusebian assumptions that were so prevalent in the later seventeenth century, it is perhaps not surprising that the Egyptianising thesis of Spencer and Marsham proved rather controversial. An early eighteenth-century rector of Tübingen University, Christoph Pfaff, found that for all Marsham's proud erudition his book was 'crammed throughout with impiety'.³³ In his memoirs, Edward Gibbon (not likely to blanch at Marsham for that reason) recalled having been 'enamoured' by Marsham's book at the age of fifteen; yet the historian of the Roman Empire nonetheless came to feel that the defects of his elaborate chronology outweighed its merits.³⁴ But the less schematic scholarship of Spencer—Master of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and Dean of Ely Cathedral—commanded, and continued to command, attention and respect.³⁵ The *De legibus* was reprinted at Cambridge in 1727 in an

of History in the Age of Newton', in *The Uses of Antiquity: The Scientific Revolution and the Classical Tradition*, ed. S. Gaukroger (Dordrecht, 1991), 171–212, at 197–98.

³¹ John Spencer, *Dissertatio de Urim & Thummim* (Cambridge, 1669); John Spencer, *De legibus Hebraeorum ritualibus et earum rationibus* (Cambridge, 1685), esp. 21–25, 519–47.

³² See further Gascoigne, 'Wisdom', 175–76; Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The memory of Egypt in western monotheism* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 55–90; Guy G. Stroumsa, 'John Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry', *History of Religions*, 41 (2001), 1–23; Fausto Parente, 'Spencer, Maimonides, and the History of Religion', in *History of Scholarship: A Selection of papers from the seminar on the history of scholarship held annually at the Warburg Institute*, ed. C. Ligota and J.-L. Quantin (Oxford, 2006), 277–304.

³³ Christoph Matthaeus Pfaff, 'Dissertatio praeliminaris' to John Spencer, *De legibus Hebraeorum ritualibus earumque rationibus, libri quatuor* (Tübingen, 1732), sigs. c1^r–g1^v, at sig. f2^r: 'Opus sanè multo eruditionis ex auctoribus antiquis haustæ apparatu superbiens, se eadem opinionem profanitate passim refertum'.

³⁴ Edward Gibbon, *Autobiography* ed. J. H. Sheffield (Oxford, 1950), 43. On Marsham's defects see further Anthony Grafton, 'Joseph Scaliger and Historical Chronology: The rise and fall of a discipline', *History and Theory*, 14 (1975), 156–85, at 177–79.

³⁵ On the reception of Spencer's ideas see further Gascoigne, 'Wisdom', 178–80, 189–90, 198–200; Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge, 1992), 156–57; Scott Mandelbrote, 'Isaac Newton and Thomas Burnet: Biblical criticism and the crisis of late seventeenth-century England', in

expensive edition subscribed to by many of the leading scholars and gentlemen of the two English universities. This edition was further reprinted at Tübingen in 1732 with a respectful introduction by rector Pfaff pointing out some of its errors and documenting the controversy provoked by the book.³⁶

The debate over the relative priority of Egyptian and Hebraic religious culture became so well established that we can even find it conducted in the realm of iconography. The first extended response to Marsham and Spencer's ideas was a book entitled *Aegyptiaca* (1683) by the Dutch theologian Hermann Witsius (1636–1708).³⁷ In his second edition of his book in 1696, Witsius took the opportunity to fire a striking visual counterblast to Spencer in an elaborately engraved frontispiece that opposes true Hebraic religion to the false Egyptian species (FIG. 1).³⁸ Seated on pedestals on either side of the image are two female figures. The figure seated on the right-hand side, shaded by a tree, represents the false Egyptian religion, fatally compromised by its idolatrous worship of animal-gods (*zoolatria*): blindfolded, suggesting her inability to see the truth, she is restraining an ox representing Apis, and holding a shield depicting Serapis, identified by his modius.³⁹ The pedestal is decorated with ibis-headed figures and a further head of Serapis. The figure on the left-hand side, decorously veiled and holding the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, represents, by contrast, true religion. Her pedestal is blank, reflecting the prohibition on graven images. Beneath—*i.e.*, subordinate—to this Hebrew figure lies a Greek sphinx. Between the two representations of alternative religions there stands Moses, identified by his rod and the radiance of his face, and a kneeling worshipper, whose gaze Moses piously directs towards the Hebraic side of the tableau.

The Books of Nature and Scripture, ed. J. E. Force and R. H. Popkin (Dordrecht, 1994), 149–77, at 158–59; Stroumsa, 'John Spencer', 19.

³⁶ John Spencer, *De legibus Hebraeorum ritualibus et earum rationibus, libri quatuor*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1727); the subscribers are listed at sigs. d2^v–e2^v. This edition, printed from Spencer's revised manuscript, contains expansions and a fourth book not present in the 1685 edition. For an account of Spencer's surviving MSS see further Mandelbrote, 'Newton and Burnett', 174 n. 51.

³⁷ Hermann Witsius, *Aegyptiaca, et ΔΕΚΑΦΥΛΟΝ* (Amsterdam, 1683).

³⁸ Hermann Witsius, *Aegyptiaca, et ΔΕΚΑΦΥΛΟΝ*, 2nd edn (Amsterdam, 1696), frontispiece. A reproduction of John Adams' copy in the Boston Public Library (Adams 152.11) is available via [ark:/13960/t8sb48zf](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:5:1-3960-t8sb48zf). I am grateful to my colleague Dr Sami Uljas for his help in interpreting this image.

³⁹ See further Witsius, *Aegyptiaca* (1696 edn), 63, 314.



Fig. 1. The frontispiece to the second edition of Hermann Witsius' *Ægyptiaca* (Amsterdam, 1696)

The background of the image again offers alternative versions of Hebrew and Egyptian religious worship. On the right-hand side three herms are visible: a ram-headed figure, probably Amun, holding a staff topped by a bird; a figure folding her arms across her chest, mummy-fashion, and holding a ritual flail; and a bird-headed figure, probably Horus, holding his crook. A standing figure tends a burnt offering at their altar, and a further supplicatory figure does them idolatrous worship. In the distance on the left-hand side, by contrast, can be seen the Ark of the Covenant and the tents of the Hebrew people, and behind that again is Mount Sinai wreathed in divine lighting. Read from left to right (as a Latin, if not a Hebrew reader would do), the image as a whole expresses in a effective and sophisticated manner both the priority and the superiority of Hebraic to Egyptian religion.

Spencer seems to have read the first edition of Witsius' book with interest, and at the end of his life magnanimously presented his copy to his College library, along with a number of other volumes from his excellent collection.⁴⁰ But the iconography of Witsius' frontispiece may have offered a particular provocation to a quite different English author, one more gentleman than scholar: Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1711). Unlike Witsius, Shaftesbury was deeply taken with the idea of Egypt as what he called 'the motherland of superstition'. Indeed, for the second edition of his *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1714), Shaftesbury left detailed instructions to the engraver of his works to provide a visual representation of this idea in the frontispiece of his third volume. Faithfully executed by the Huguenot artist Simon Gribelin, this image tells a visual story of the passage of priestcraft and religion from ancient Egypt, represented by a pyramid, an obelisk, Isis, and the figure of the river Nile; through to the Hebrews, represented by a boy Moses bearing his rod and a fox-skin; on again to classical Rome, symbolised by a temple, trophies, and a standard bearer; and on again at last to the Church of Rome, represented by a 'comely matrone' receiving the homage of a gothic king and a military youth.⁴¹ The significance of

⁴⁰ Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, shelfmark B.10.11 (formerly C. 1. 17), inscribed: 'Donum venerabilis viri Joh: Spenceri S.T.B. nuper Coll[eg]ij Præfecti'. An early reader has indicated some of the more prominent discussions of Spencer's *De Urim & Thummim* by turning down the pages.

⁴¹ Felix Paknadel, 'Shaftesbury's Illustrations of *Characteristicks*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 37 (1974), 290–312, at 302–4. Quotations are from Shaftesbury's instructions (National Archives, PRO 30/24/26/1), as cited by Paknadel.

Shaftesbury's mischievous iconography is well established; but the suggestion that he may have been consciously responding to Witsius' image of a few years earlier is (I believe) novel.

With the earl of Shaftesbury we enter the realm of the early eighteenth century freethinkers. Marsham's religious purposes were suspected, and John Spencer's have remained a matter of scholarly controversy.⁴² But whatever their purposes it is certainly the case that it was among an overtly freethinking readership that some of their ideas about the priority of Egyptian religion took on their most active life.⁴³ In his *Letters to Serena* (1704), John Toland made a strong case for the primacy of Egyptian religion and learning throughout Africa and Asia, and denied the claims of 'the Jews and a world of Christians' that the Egyptians 'had all their Learning from ABRAHAM'.⁴⁴ In a more scholarly if scarcely less polemical vein, Toland also developed the insights of both Marsham and Spencer in his *Origins of the Jews*, in which he fiercely attacked Pierre-Daniel Huet's claim that it was Moses who first gave laws to the Egyptians.⁴⁵

Bolingbroke is another notable instance of a freethinker whose anti-Hebraic and anti-Christian philosophical theism turned, in part, upon Egyptian evidence that had been furnished to him by Spencer.⁴⁶ Bolingbroke was concerned with the ancient Egyptians' conception of divinity. Were they simply gross polytheists, or could the glimmerings of monotheism be discerned among them? It was in this light that Bolingbroke made much of the monotheistic potential of the 'unborn eternal KNEPH' who had been worshipped at Thebes in Upper Egypt.⁴⁷

Perhaps the most thoroughgoingly Egyptian freethinker of the earlier eighteenth century was Shaftesbury himself. In the second of the *Miscellaneous Reflections* that occupy the third volume of his *Characteristicks*,

⁴² See Stroumsa, 'John Spencer', esp. 19, for a more orthodox interpretation, aimed against the more heterodox Spencer presented in Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft*, 155.

⁴³ On this point see also Gascoigne, 'Wisdom', 198. Jonathan M. Elukin, 'Maimonides and the Rise and Fall of the Sabians: Explaining Mosaic laws and the limits of scholarship', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 63 (2002), 619–37, is sadly mistaken in supposing (p. 627) that Edward Herbert (d. 1648) drew upon Spencer's *De legibus* (1685).

⁴⁴ Toland, *Letters to Serena*, 39; see also 70. See further Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2003), 204–5.

⁴⁵ Toland, 'Origines Judaicae', esp. 112; for Toland's homage to Marsham and Spencer, see 198. See further Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the crisis of Christian culture, 1696–1722* (Manchester, 2003), 174–76.

⁴⁶ Bolingbroke defends Spencer and alludes scornfully to Witsius' *Aegyptiaca* in 'Essay the Second', in *Philosophical Essays*, vol. I, 312.

⁴⁷ Bolingbroke, 'Essay the Third', in *Philosophical Works*, vol. II, 230.

that noble author came to the thoroughly Spencerian conclusion that 'the Manners, Opinions, Rites and Customs of the EGYPTIANS, had, in the earliest times, and from Generation to Generation, strongly influenc'd the HEBREW People (their Guests, and Subjects) and had undoubtedly gain'd a powerful Ascendancy over their Natures.' Shaftesbury thus leaned heavily on both Marsham and Spencer for his understanding of Egyptian religion.⁴⁸ But in his *Characteristicks*, he also ventures a thought about Egypt which owes as much to Sir William Petty as it does to the Master of Corpus. Drawing upon the newly-minted science of 'political arithmetic', Shaftesbury offers an account of ancient Egyptian society that sees it as demonstrating the inevitable growth of priestcraft. Egypt, according to Shaftesbury, both authorised the accumulative donation of property to a priestly caste, and restrained neither 'the *Number or Possessions* of the Sacred Body.' It was therefore inevitable that the numbers of that caste should have expanded so far as 'in a manner to have swallow'd up the State and Monarchy.'⁴⁹ As we shall see, there is good reason to suppose that this aspect of Shaftesbury's treatise helped shape David Hume's later account of the natural history of religion.

Accounts of 'deism' sometimes treat it as an exclusively philosophical phenomenon, in which reason is employed to cut through the historical and exegetical claims of Christianity. But the uptake of Spencer's revision of the modern Eusebians' account of ancient near-Eastern religion reminds us that the nature of ancient religion, particularly ancient Egyptian religion, remained an important battleground for earlier-eighteenth-century freethinkers. Here, as so often elsewhere, the bright weapons of eighteenth-century enlightened warfare were forged in the murky smithies of seventeenth-century erudition.⁵⁰

III

Our account so far brings a number of aspects of Hume's dissertation into sharper focus. We have seen, to begin with, why it should have been quite natural for him to have begun a naturalistic inquiry into the 'origin of

⁴⁸ Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, 'Miscellaneous Reflections' [1711], in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 2 vols, ed. P. Ayres (Oxford, 1999), vol. II, 127–293 (quotation at 156); see also Shaftesbury's own notes at 154–56.

⁴⁹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, vol. II, 152, 151 (*Miscellaneous Reflections*, II. i).

⁵⁰ Pace Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (Oxford, 2006), esp. 472.

religion in human nature' with a consideration of the question of 'polytheism or idolatry'.⁵¹ This was precisely where both freethinkers and the orthodox had started for a century previously. But unlike Toland or Shaftesbury or Bolingbroke, Hume does not advert explicitly to learned debates over the relative priority of ancient religions. The only scholarly work on ancient religion to which Hume's *Natural History* acknowledges a debt is Thomas Hyde's study of Zoroastrianism (*Historia religionis veterum Persarum, eorumque magorum*, 1700), which, although itself in part an extension of modern Eusebianism, emerged too late to enter the debates over it.⁵² There is no question, however, that Hume was fully aware of these debates. Hume's notes on his reading of Herodotus record that author's 'very good' reason 'why the Greeks borrow'd their Religion from the Aegyptians & not *e contra*'.⁵³ Still more significant than this, however, is the tacit intervention that Hume makes in the controversy in the *Natural History of Religion*.

Spencer had argued that Hebrew religious rituals derived from Egypt. One consequence of this was that the relapse of the children of Israel into idol-worship that is so richly documented in the Pentateuch became a constant *topos* in the hands of freethinkers. John Toland posed this perpetual inclination 'to the most gross idolatries', by contrast with their later endeavour to be 'obstinately careful to keep their race entire', as one of the central problems of Jewish political history.⁵⁴ Shaftesbury, drawing again upon Marsham, spoke of the Hebrews 'relapsing perpetually into the same Worship to which they had been so long accustom'd'.⁵⁵ Bolingbroke even makes a rare ascent to wit on the subject: 'They forgot the true God, even whilst he conducted them visibly through the desert. They revolted from him whilst the peals of thunder, that proclaimed his

⁵¹ Hume, *Natural History*, 1 (Introduction), 3 (§1).

⁵² Thomas Hyde, *Historia religionis veterum Persarum, eorumque magorum* (Oxford, 1700); Hume, *Natural History*, 52 n. (§vii) and 61 n. (§ix). See further Guy G. Stroumsa, 'Thomas Hyde and the Birth of Zoroastrian Studies', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 26 (2002), 216–30.

⁵³ Ernest Campbell Mossner, 'Hume's Early Memoranda, 1729–1740: The complete text', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 9 (1948), 492–518, at 516. Mossner's edition must be used in conjunction with the damaging re-examination by M. A. Stewart, 'The Dating of Hume's Manuscripts', in *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in reinterpretation*, ed. P. B. Wood (Rochester, NY, 2000), 267–314, esp. 267, 276–88, 309 n. 5. Cf. Herodotus, *Histories*, bk II, ch. 43.

⁵⁴ See John Toland, 'Two Problems, Historical, Political, and Theological, Concerning the Jewish Nation and Religion', in *Nazarenus: or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity*, 2nd edn (London, 1718), Appendix, 4.

⁵⁵ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, vol. II, 155 (*Miscellaneous Reflections*, II.i).

descent on the mountain, rattled in their ears, and whilst he dictated his laws to them.⁵⁶ It is on account of jibes such as these that Andrew Michael ('The Chevalier') Ramsay—in a passage that Hume quotes in the *Natural History*—characterised 'modern freethinkers' as holding the Israelites to be 'the most stupid, ungrateful, rebellious and perfidious of all nations.'⁵⁷ It is the prominence of this view of the Hebrew tendency towards idolatry that explains Hume's sly assertion at the beginning of the *Natural History* that, against his thesis of universal ancient polytheism, 'the theism, and that too not entirely pure, of one or two nations' forms 'no objection worth regarding'.⁵⁸

But it is Egyptian religion above all, with its veneration of alliums and cats, that provides Hume some of his best instances of the ridiculous nature of ancient idolatry—and a foil for some contemporary beliefs that appeared to him no less curious. 'How can you worship leeks and onions, we shall suppose a *Sorbonnist* to say to a priest of *Sais*? If we worship them, replies the latter; at least, we do not, at the same time, eat them.'⁵⁹ As this suggests, Hume treats Egypt in a rather different way from the ostensibly informed speculations of Toland or Shaftesbury. We have seen that Shaftesbury's political arithmetic of the ancient Egyptian priesthood had rested heavily and explicitly upon the erudition of Spencer and Marsham. Hume's account of Egyptian religion, by contrast, is wilfully unscholarly. In fact his own version of Egyptian political arithmetic is decidedly—parodically—conjectural:

There occurs, I own, a difficulty in the *Egyptian* system of theology; as indeed, few systems are entirely free from difficulties. It is evident, from their method of propagation, that a couple of cats, in fifty years, would stock a whole kingdom; and if that religious veneration were still paid them, it would, in twenty more, not only be easier in *Egypt* to find a god than a

⁵⁶ Bolingbroke, 'Essay the Third', in *Philosophical Essays*, vol. II, 207.

⁵⁷ Andrew Michael ('The Chevalier') Ramsay, *The Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion* (Glasgow, 1748–49), vol. II, 403–4 and 404–5. Hume, *Natural History*, 99–102 note a (§XIII).

⁵⁸ Hume, *Natural History*, 3 (§I). It follows that Mark Webb, 'The Argument of the *Natural History*', *Hume Studies*, 1991 (1991), 141–60, at 147, has missed Hume's point here. J. G. A. Pocock, 'Superstition and Enthusiasm in Gibbon's History of Religion', *Eighteenth Century Life*, 7 (1982), 83–94, at 84–85, is characteristically superior.

⁵⁹ Hume, *Natural History*, 76 (§XII). The source for the Egyptian worship of alliums is Juvenal, *Satires*, xv. 9 (cited by Spencer, *De legibus* (1727 edn), vol. I, 31); this satire had provided a common *topos* for anti-Catholic polemic long before Hume: see Tom T. Tashiro, 'English Poets, Egyptian Onions, and the Protestant View of the Eucharist', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 30 (1969), 563–78.

man, which *Petronius* says was the case in some parts of *Italy*; but the gods must at last entirely starve the men, and leave themselves neither priests nor votaries remaining. It is probable, therefore, that that wise nation, the most celebrated in antiquity for prudence and sound policy,⁶⁰ foreseeing such dangerous consequences, reserved all their worship for the full-grown divinities, and used the freedom to drown the holy spawn or little sucking gods, without any scruple or remorse.

Shaftesbury had equated a growing number of priests with the inevitable rise of priestcraft; and Hume's conclusion to this feline passage makes the deliberate parody of Shaftesbury's argument complete: 'And thus the practice of warping the tenets of religion, in order to serve temporal interests, is not, by any means, to be regarded as an invention of these later ages.'⁶¹ Hume evidently no longer feels any need to defer, as he had done in the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), to 'my Lord Shaftesbury'.⁶² It would be pointless to accuse him of not taking Egyptian religion seriously: his point is that the use to which Shaftesbury has already put it is quite silly enough.

Even more deadly, however, is Hume's direct intervention in the debate over the relative priority of Judaic and Egyptian religion. He joins this battle in a note in the same twelfth section of the *Natural History*. 'It is strange', Hume observes, 'that the *Egyptian* religion, tho' so absurd, should yet have borne so great a resemblance to the *Jewish*, that antient writers even of the greatest genius'—he instances Tacitus and Suetonius—'were not able to observe any difference betwixt them.'⁶³ Tacitus had been a vital witness in Spencer's thesis about the dependence of Hebraic religion from its Egyptian origins.⁶⁴ Moreover, Spencer himself—following a lead adumbrated in Athanasius Kircher's *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1652)—had clearly acknowledged the close *affinitas* between Hebrew and Egyptian rites. In fact, he had even brought together precisely the same two passages from Tacitus' *Annals* and Suetonius' *Tiberius* that Hume also quotes—but in support of his argument that God had permitted the Israelites to maintain many Egyptian rites in order that the people should not 'shrink back

⁶⁰ This may be a jibe against Warburton, who had stressed the political prudence of the Egyptians: see William Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated, on the Principles of a Religious Deist*, 3rd edn (London, 1742), 434–35.

⁶¹ Hume, *Natural History*, 80 (§XII).

⁶² Hume, *Treatise*, vol. I, 6 (Introduction).

⁶³ Hume, *Natural History*, 76–77 note a.

⁶⁴ On this point see esp. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 61–65.

to the superstition of Egypt'.⁶⁵ In Hume's hands, by contrast, the Roman historians—the references possibly even borrowed directly from Spencer—simply bear authoritative witness to the indistinguishable nature of the two cults. Freethinkers may debate with the orthodox, and the orthodox with each other, over whether the Jews derived their religion from the Egyptians, or the Egyptians from the Jews, Hume seems to imply. But these 'wise heathens, observing something in the general air, and genius, and spirit of the two religions to be the same, esteemed the differences of their dogmas too frivolous to deserve any attention.'⁶⁶ Hume's arch footnote knowingly condemns to irrelevance what had hitherto been a central issue in the history of polytheism and idolatry; here is erudition becoming enlightenment.

IV

These Egyptian considerations open the way to a larger question about Hume's *Natural History of Religion*. Who, and what, is it aimed at? It is clear that Hume's naturalistic history of idolatry is of a rather different stamp from those perpetrated by the freethinkers who had preceded him. While it may be helpful, therefore, to establish a tradition of religious natural histories into which the *Natural History of Religion* can be placed, it is not quite sufficient to do so. On the contrary, we have to recognise the polemical intent of Hume's work—although surely only the most cloth-eared philosopher, or the most literal-minded editor, needs to be reminded of this.⁶⁷ But if the *Natural History of Religion* is indeed a polemic, against whom is it directed? Even in the wake of Beauchamp's recent critical edition this question remains open.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Spencer, *De legibus* (1727 edn), vol. II, 649 (= 1685 edn, 531–32): 'Deus itaque ritus Ægypti plurimos, splendore præsertim aliquo plebem fascinantes, Israelitis concessit & censervavit [*sic: recte conservavit*]; ne populus ille, moris antiqui tenax, sacris novis aut rudibus offensus, a Legis institutis ad Ægypti superstitionem resiliret.' Contrast Witsius, *Ægyptiaca* (1696 edn), 5.

⁶⁶ Hume, *Natural History*, 77 (§XII). On Hume's deliberate disregard of the question of the special dispensation of the Jews, see also John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680–1760* (Cambridge, 2005), 312.

⁶⁷ See Christopher J. Wheatley, 'Polemical Aspects of Hume's *Natural History of Religion*', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 19 (1986), 502–14. Wheatley does not go on to ask who Hume's polemical targets actually were.

⁶⁸ David Hume, *A Dissertation on the Passions [and] The Natural History of Religion: A critical edition*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford, 2007).

I have just proposed that the second Miscellany of Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks* is one evident target of the artificial malice of Hume's *Natural History*. Others are comprehended by the first section of Hume's dissertation. It begins with an assertion that is transparently polemical: 'polytheism or idolatry was, and necessarily must have been, the first and most antient religion of mankind.'⁶⁹ It continues by addressing those who would dispute this directly: 'Shall we assert, that, in more antient times, before the knowledge of letters, or the discovery of any art or science, men entertained the principles of pure theism? That is, while they were ignorant and barbarous, they discovered truth: But fell into error, as soon as they acquired learning and politeness.' 'In this assertion', Hume goes on, 'you . . . contradict all appearance of probability'.⁷⁰

Who is this 'you'? At its most obvious level this can be taken as an attack on anyone who believed that the Old Testament provided an account of a chosen people who had practiced monotheism since the creation of the world. As such, any orthodox Christian who credited the Mosaic history ought to have been offended by Hume's argument—and a number duly were.⁷¹ Nonetheless, as William Warburton, who was one of them, observed, Hume is 'as silent concerning the Bible as if no such book had ever been written.'⁷² Hume's purposes therefore go beyond those of the freethinkers like Toland and Bolingbroke. Where they had laboured to bring the Mosaic history into disrepute, Hume simply ignores it.

Nonetheless, the point of much of the neo-Eusebians' apologetic had been to uphold sacred history precisely by showing how well it conformed to other, non-Revealed evidence. This had been a particular goal of Ralph Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, and this may help suggest why Cudworth (1617–1688) has been proposed as Hume's most

⁶⁹ Hume, *Natural History*, 3 (§1). In later editions of the *Natural History* Hume tended, unsystematically, to replace references to 'idolatry' with 'polytheism': see Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, 310 n. 96.

⁷⁰ Hume, *Natural History*, 4 (§1).

⁷¹ [Thomas Stona] ('S. T.'), *Remarks upon the Natural History of Religion by Mr. Hume* (London, 1758), 2: 'an opinion entirely repugnant to the profession of the Mosaic history'. See also Beauchamp, 'Introduction: A history of two dissertations', in Hume, *A Dissertation on the Passions [and] The Natural History of Religion* (Oxford, 2007), xi–cxxxii, at xxi, cxxxi, citing the similar objections of Caleb Fleming and Duncan Shaw.

⁷² [William Warburton and Richard Hurd], *Remarks on Mr. David Hume's Essay on the Natural History of Religion* (London, 1757), 25. Yet it seems sadly unhistorical to characterise Warburton as a 'fundamentalist' (Lorne Falkenstein, 'Hume's Project in *The Natural History of Religion*', *Religious Studies*, 39 (2003), 1–21, at 4–5).

plausible target in the *Natural History*.⁷³ In particular, Cudworth had mounted an elaborate argument in the fourth chapter of the *True Intellectual System* in support of the proposition that, for all their apparent idolatry, 'the ancient Pagan Theists' had ultimately 'acknowledged One Supreme God'.⁷⁴

Hume was certainly familiar with Cudworth's views on such questions: notes he took after 1737⁷⁵ pertaining to the 'quarternio of atheisms' identified in chapter III of the *True Intellectual System*, and a more precisely locatable reference to a specific point made in chapter v, still survive.⁷⁶ Hume also added Cudworth's name to that of Samuel Clark as a proponent of the 'abstract theory of morals' in the fifth edition of the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1764).⁷⁷ By this period Cudworth had become more than his book; he was a whole climate of opinion. An index of the persistence of his ideas is suggested by Johann Mosheim's Latin translation of 1733 and Thomas Birch's second English edition ten years later.⁷⁸ Hume's *Natural History* may therefore be said to have both Cudworth himself and a more general mid-eighteenth century 'Cudworthianism' in its sights.

The freethinker Shaftesbury owed not a little to Cudworth.⁷⁹ But perhaps the most prominent, although not unreserved, orthodox admirer of the 'great' Cudworth was William Warburton, in the third book of his magnum opus, *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated, on the*

⁷³ See Michel Malherbe, 'Hume's *Natural History of Religion*', *Hume Studies*, 21 (1995), 255–74, at 273 n. 12; Beauchamp, 'Intellectual Background', 226 and n. 132.

⁷⁴ Cudworth, *True Intellectual System*, 230. On this point see further Richard H. Popkin, 'Cudworth', in *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden, 1992), 333–50, at 338–40.

⁷⁵ For this dating, see Stewart, 'Dating of Hume's Manuscripts', at 276–88.

⁷⁶ Printed in Mossner, 'Hume's Early Memoranda', 503, 514; and cf. Cudworth, *True Intellectual System*, 134–45 ('the quarternio of atheisms') and 713 (Valens' prophesy).

⁷⁷ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford, 1998), 140.

⁷⁸ Ralph Cudworth, *Systema intellectualis huius universi*, ed. Johann in Lorenz Mosheim (Jena, 1733; repr. 1773); Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, ed. Thomas Birch (London, 1743). An abbreviated version of the *System* was also published by Thomas Wise: see Ralph Cudworth and Thomas Wise, *A Confutation of the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism* (London, 1706; repr. 1732). See further Sarah Hutton, 'Classicism and Baroque: A note on J. L. Mosheim's footnotes to Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe*', in *Johann Lorenz Mosheim (1693–1755)*, ed. M. Mulsow (Wiesbaden, 1997), 211–27.

⁷⁹ See J. A. Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1990), 96–99; Lawrence Klein, 'Introduction', to Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (Cambridge, 1999), vii–xxxi, at xxix.

Principles of a Religious Deist (1738–41).⁸⁰ Nonetheless, Warburton is not concerned in the *Divine Legation* to dogmatise on the question of primitive monotheism, which he suggests, but does not assert, was held by the ancient Egyptians.⁸¹ It does not appear, then, that Warburton ('whom I neither know nor care for')⁸² is Hume's principal target in the matter of ancient polytheism—for all that Hume immediately became a target for Warburton in his *Remarks*. It is certainly true that Hume is concerned in general to discredit Warburton's broad assertion, made in Book II of the *Divine Legation*, that a doctrine of a future state is necessary to society; but it is not on Warburton's eschatological territory that Hume chooses to join battle in the *Natural History of Religion*.

There is an even more slavish Cudworthian than Warburton, however, who makes an intriguing candidate as the object of Hume's polemic: an author whom Hume had not only read but who had been his cicerone around Paris in 1734: the Chevalier Ramsay (1686–1743).⁸³ Ramsay, who had been converted by Fénelon himself to a species of mystical Catholicism, has only been proposed in passing as a target of Hume's *Natural History*.⁸⁴ Yet he certainly is one. Hume is too polite to assault his dead acquaintance directly, but he signals that we are to consider their relations by a footnote towards the end of the *Natural History* which describes Ramsay—in very backhanded terms indeed—as 'a writer, who had so laudable an inclination to be orthodox, that his reason never found any difficulty, even in the doctrines which free-thinkers scruple the most, the trinity, incarnation, and satisfaction'.⁸⁵ A further passage at the beginning of section XII of the *Natural History* might also have been written with Ramsay in mind: 'We meet every day with people so sceptical with regard to history, that they assert it impossible for any nation ever to believe such

⁸⁰ See Warburton, *Divine Legation*, esp. 420, 429, 436, 446. On Warburton, see further Brian W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1998), 167–212.

⁸¹ Warburton, *Divine Legation*, 441–42.

⁸² Hume to John Stewart, [Feb. 1754], in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, 2 vols (Oxford, 1932), vol. I, 186.

⁸³ On Ramsay, see further Scott Mandelbrote, 'Ramsay, Andrew Michael [Jacobite Sir Andrew Ramsay, baronet] (1686–1743)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 60 vols, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and B. Harrison (Oxford, 2004), vol. XLV, 915–17.

⁸⁴ See Beauchamp, 'Intellectual Background', 226 and n. 132. Richard H. Popkin, 'Sources of Knowledge of Sextus Empiricus in Hume's Time', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 54 (1993), 137–41, notes that 'Ramsay has not been sufficiently examined either as a thinker in his own right or as a possible source of some of Hume's ideas and interpretations of other philosophers' (140).

⁸⁵ Hume, *Natural History*, 99 note a (§XIII).

absurd principles as those of *Greek* and *Egyptian* paganism; and at the same time so dogmatical with regard to religion, that they think the same absurdities are to be found in no other communions.⁸⁶

Certainly the explicitly Cudworthian apologetic that Ramsay advances in the second part of his posthumously-published *Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion* (1748–49) takes just the form that Hume knocks down in the first section of the *Natural History*. According to Ramsay, there were ‘in all ages and nations, since the fall, holy elect souls among the Pagans who did not follow the gross corruptions of their false religions’.⁸⁷ Indeed, ‘the Pagans of all nations, ages and religions, the Chinese, the Indians, the Persians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans acknowledged one supream Deity, whose essential attributes are infinite power, wisdom and goodness.’⁸⁸

Yet I have already suggested that Hume’s purposes extend beyond simply discrediting the Mosaic history that Ramsay sought to rescue from the attacks of ‘Atheists, Deists, Freethinkers, and minute Philosophers of all kinds’.⁸⁹ This point will become sharper when we consider that the Cudworthian argument that ancient philosophers had perceived the unity of God in a form of primitive monotheism was by no means restricted to the orthodox.⁹⁰ A more heterodox species of it than that of the Freemason Ramsay was offered by another author who, rather curiously, has also scarcely been discussed in the context of Hume’s *Natural History*: Bolingbroke.

V

On the rare occasions when he is considered as a philosopher as well as simply a statesman, Bolingbroke is often described—following the lead of his contemporary enemies—as a ‘deist’.⁹¹ This reputation is very largely

⁸⁶ Hume, *Natural History*, 72 (§XII).

⁸⁷ Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, vol. II, 21–22. On the nature of Ramsay’s apologetic see further Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, 231–63.

⁸⁸ Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, vol. II, 108. For Ramsay’s approbation of Cudworth, see vol. II, v and 28–110.

⁸⁹ Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles*, vol. II, iii.

⁹⁰ But see David Hays, ‘Carmontelle’s Design for the Jardin de Monceau: A freemasonic garden in late-eighteenth-century France’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 32 (1999), 447–62, at 455, for an interpretation of the second volume of Ramsay’s *Philosophical Principles* in terms of an archetypal freemasonic religion.

⁹¹ See esp. W. McIntosh Merrill, *From Statesman to Philosopher: A study in Bolingbroke’s deism* (New York, 1949), a study that manifests no interest at all in Bolingbroke’s engagement with modern Eusebianism.

owing to the essays, originally addressed to Alexander Pope, which were first published as part of the lavish quarto *Works* that Bolingbroke's executor David Mallet brought out in 1754, three years after his former patron's death.⁹² Richard Hurd charged much later that Bolingbroke's 'big volumes of impiety sunk immediately into utter contempt',⁹³ yet the appearance in the same year from an anonymous publisher of a smaller octavo set containing his *Philosophical Works* alone suggests that there was indeed a contemporary market for Bolingbroke's particular species of anti-Christian 'theism'—as he himself called it.⁹⁴

Whether or not Bolingbroke's books sold, they certainly proved quickly controversial. Nathaniel Ball, in a hostile appendix to an anti-deistic sermon, observed that 'The late Lord Bolingbroke, in his posthumous writings, has distinguish'd himself by a superiority of disdain for the Bible and its advocates, as well as by a superiority of genius'.⁹⁵ The yet more hostile Ralph Heathcote wrote that the 'The alarm, which the bare rumour of this *Right Honorable's* Works had raised, was very great,' and found 'our fears for Morality and Religion but too well grounded'.⁹⁶ James Boswell recorded Dr Johnson's 'just indignation' at the 'beggarly scotchman' Mallet for his role in drawing the trigger of Bolingbroke's 'blunderbuss against Religion and Morality'.⁹⁷ Their friend David Garrick wrote of Bolingbroke's 'fell Genius' issuing forth in the volumes.⁹⁸ And Horace Walpole found it 'comical to see' how Bolingbroke was 'given up here since the best of his writings, his metaphysical divinity, has been published'.⁹⁹ More substantively—and

⁹² *The Works of the Right Honorable Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke*, ed. David Mallet, 5 vols, 4^o (London, 1754). In his will Bolingbroke left Mallet 'the Copy and Copies of all the Manuscript Books, Papers, and Writings, which I have written or composed, or shall write or compose, and leave at the Time of my Decease' (*The Last Will and Testament of the Late Rt. Hon. Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke* (London, 1752), 10).

⁹³ [Richard Hurd], *A Discourse, By Way of General Preface to the Quarto Edition of Bishop Warburton's Works* (London, 1794), 77. James Sambrook, 'Mallet, David (1701/2?–1765)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. XXXVI, 328–31, repeats (p. 330) the charge of a poor sale.

⁹⁴ Bolingbroke, *The Philosophical Works*, ed. Mallet, 5 vols, 8^o (London, 1754). This octavo edition does not contain the dedication to Alexander Pope that prefaces the philosophical essays in the quarto *Works*.

⁹⁵ Nathaniel Ball, *The Deist Confuted Upon His Own Principles... To which is added, an Appendix, containing Remarks on Lord Bolingbroke's Objections to Revelation* (London, 1755), 24.

⁹⁶ Ralph Heathcote, *A Sketch of Lord Bolingbroke's Philosophy* (London, 1755), 3.

⁹⁷ James Boswell, *Life of Johnson: An Edition of the Original Manuscript*, vol. I: 1709–1765, ed. M. Waingrow (Edinburgh, 1994), 194 (6 Mar. 1754).

⁹⁸ Boswell, *Life*, vol. I, 195.

⁹⁹ Walpole to Sir Horace Mann, 1 Dec. 1754, in *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford*, ed. Peter Cunningham, 9 vols (London, 1861), vol. II, 409.

with far-reaching historiographical consequences—the presbyterian John Leland found himself having to devote an unplanned second volume of his hostile *View of the Principal Deistical Writers of the Last and Present Century* (1755) equally to Hume's *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and to Mallet's quarto edition of Bolingbroke's posthumous works.¹⁰⁰ Last, and perhaps not least, Bolingbroke's essays quickly provoked a transparently anonymous refutation from the white knight of mid-eighteenth century orthodox Christianity, William Warburton.¹⁰¹

Hume was certainly interested, in his olympian way, in Bolingbroke's posthumous literary appearance. He reported to Adam Smith in September 1752, slightly mistakenly, that 'All the rest of Bolingbroke's Works went to the Press last Week'—but added: 'I confess my Curiosity is not much rais'd.'¹⁰² Hume did rouse himself, however, to read Mallet's edition of the *Works* when it actually appeared in 1754, although the judgment he passed upon 'Lord Bolingbroke's posthumous Productions' to his French translator Le Blanc was severe: 'Never were so many Volumes, containing so little Variety & Instruction: so much Arrogance & Declamation. The Clergy are all enrag'd against him; but they have no Reason. Were they never attack'd by more forcible Weapons than his, they might for ever keep Possession of their Authority.'¹⁰³ Yet at the end of his life Hume was invoking Mallet's role in the publication of Bolingbroke as part of his efforts to persuade Adam Smith to publish the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* after his death: 'Was Mallet any wise hurt by his Publication of Lord Bolingbroke?'¹⁰⁴

Arrogant or not, Bolingbroke's metaphysical divinity is if anything even more preoccupied than Ramsay's had been by the existence of polytheism and its relation to what he calls 'true theism'.¹⁰⁵ Just as Ramsay had been, however, Bolingbroke is also notable for his desire to turn—or perhaps that should be to pervert—to his own ends both the scholarship of the modern Eusebians and also Cudworth's more philosophical case

¹⁰⁰ John Leland, *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers of the Last and Present Century*, vol. II (London, 1755).

¹⁰¹ [William Warburton], *A View of Lord Bolingbroke's Philosophy; In Four Letters to a Friend*, 3 Parts (London, 1754–55).

¹⁰² Hume to Adam Smith, 24 Sep. 1752, in *Letters of David Hume*, vol. I, 168. Bolingbroke's *Letters on the Study and Use of History* was his only new work to appear (from Hume's publisher Andrew Millar) in 1752.

¹⁰³ Hume to the Abbé Le Blanc, 24 Oct. 1754, in *Letters of David Hume*, vol. I, 208 (no. 101).

¹⁰⁴ Hume to Adam Smith, 3 May 1776, in *Letters of David Hume*, vol. II, 316.

¹⁰⁵ Bolingbroke, 'Essay the Third', in *Philosophical Works*, vol. II, 218.

for pagan rational apprehension of the divine nature. Yet Bolingbroke's species of theist polemic is not, as Ramsay's is, vulgarly and uniformly monotheistic. In his second essay Bolingbroke confesses that he 'once very much inclined' to Cudworth's argument that 'the unity of God was the original belief of mankind, and that polytheism and idolatry were the corruptions of this orthodox faith.'¹⁰⁶ Now, however, Bolingbroke tells us he favours the view that 'polytheism and idolatry have so close a connection with the few superficial and ill-verified ideas and notions of rude ignorant men, and with the affections of their minds, that one of them could not fail to be their first religious principle, nor the other their first religious practice.'¹⁰⁷ No doubt it was the similarity of this kind of argument to those made by Hume that led Warburton to charge that Hume's assertion of the priority of polytheism to monotheism was 'one of Bolingbroke's capital arguments'.¹⁰⁸

Hume's similarity to Bolingbroke on this point leave claims for the 'radical' nature of Hume's dissertation in this respect somewhat exposed.¹⁰⁹ But it would be quite mistaken to go so far in the other direction as to suppose from Warburton's comment, as Malherbe has, that Hume's essay 'borrows a large part of its content' from Bolingbroke.¹¹⁰ For Bolingbroke eventually emerges in his third essay, 'On the Rise and Progress of Monotheism', as an eloquent defender of the existence of a very ancient monotheism. Polytheism and idolatry, he argues, did not in fact prevail 'among the nations of the world from the beginning'.¹¹¹ Quite the reverse: the principle of the unity of God 'could not fail to be discovered' once men pushed their philosophical researches up to a 'first, intelligent, self-existent cause of all

¹⁰⁶ Bolingbroke, 'Essay the Second', in *Philosophical Works*, vol. I, 298–99.

¹⁰⁷ Bolingbroke, 'Essay the Second', in *Philosophical Works*, vol. I, 301.

¹⁰⁸ Warburton to Andrew Millar, 7 Feb. 1757, as cited in Mossner, 'Hume's *Four Dissertations*', 44. See also [Warburton and Hurd], *Remarks*, 25: 'Lord Bolingbroke, you know, before him had employed this very medium of the priority of Polytheism to Theism, to inforce the same conclusion, namely NATURALISM'.

¹⁰⁹ Harrison, *Religion*, 169; see also Schmidt, 'Polytheisms', 21. Yet nor does this mean that we should find Hume's essay 'unexceptional' in its thesis about the priority of polytheism: *pace* Christopher J. Berry, 'Rude Religion: The psychology of polytheism in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *The Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Wood, 315–34, the fact that Hume's case was indeed 'reiterated' (p. 317) by later authors such as Lord Kames, Adam Smith, Gilbert Stuart, and Adam Ferguson says nothing whatsoever about its originality when Hume first made it in 1757; Berry's essay does not mention Bolingbroke. See also M. A. Stewart, 'The Early British Reception of Hume's Writings on Religion', in *The Reception of David Hume in Europe*, ed. P. Jones (London, 2005), 30–42, at 31.

¹¹⁰ Malherbe, 'Hume's *Natural History*', 256.

¹¹¹ Bolingbroke, 'Essay the Third', in *Philosophical Works*, vol. II, 236.

things'.¹¹² The true, monotheistic, God 'was known to such as made a due use of their reason, and demonstrated by them to others, even in nations unknown to us'.¹¹³ Although he sometimes distances himself from the *True Intellectual System*, then, it is clear that Bolingbroke's essays nonetheless stand at the end of a path in conjectural historical theology that had been beaten most thoroughly in the fourth chapter of Cudworth's book.¹¹⁴

It is the refutation of just Bolingbroke's kind of argument for rational monotheism that occupies Hume in the first section of the *Natural History of Religion*. Far from monotheism being present in unknown ancient nations, 'about 1700 years ago all mankind were idolators'.¹¹⁵ This is proved by 'the natural progress of human thought': the human mind rises from inferior to superior ideas, from imperfection to the idea of perfection; a 'barbarous, necessitous animal (such as man is on the first origin of society)' does not 'admire the regular face of nature'. On the contrary, the more regular nature is, the less inclined humans are to examine it:

We may as reasonably imagine, that men inhabited palaces before huts and cottages, or studied geometry before agriculture; as assert that the deity appeared to them a pure spirit, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, before he was apprehended to be a powerful, tho' limited being, with human passions and appetites, limbs and organs.¹¹⁶

Contra the Cudworthianism of both Ramsay and Bolingbroke, then, polytheism or idolatry must indeed have been the first and most ancient religion of mankind. Hume's early essay 'Of the Parties of Great Britain' (1741) had been a critical reflection on Bolingbroke's *Dissertation upon Parties* (1733–34).¹¹⁷ So too, I suggest, does Hume's *Natural History of Religion* take as its starting-point the refutation of his old adversary's essay 'On the Rise and Progress of Monotheism'.

¹¹² Bolingbroke, 'Essay the Second', in *Philosophical Works*, vol. II, 1–2.

¹¹³ Bolingbroke, 'Essay the Third', in *Philosophical Works*, vol. II, 217–18; see also 165.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Heathcote, *Sketch of Lord Bolingbroke's Philosophy*, 27, on how Bolingbroke 'learned many . . . things, from Cudworth.'

¹¹⁵ Hume, *Natural History*, 3 (§1).

¹¹⁶ Hume, *Natural History*, 5, 6 (§1).

¹¹⁷ On this point see Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge, 1975), 195–205. But see also Istvan Hont, 'The Rhapsody of Public Debt: David Hume and voluntary state bankruptcy', in *Jealousy of Trade: International competition and the nation-state in historical perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 325–53, at 337, for the case that on the matter of public debt Hume's views mirrored Bolingbroke's.

VI

If my suggestion that Bolingbroke is one of Hume's chief targets in the *Natural History* is correct, then we may also need to reconsider the date of the work's composition. On the basis of Hume's comment in a letter to his publisher Andrew Millar in 1755 that he had kept his four dissertations 'some Years by me', and following Mossner, it has been usual to suppose that Hume first drafted the *Natural History* between the very late 1740s and very early 1750s.¹¹⁸ Certainly Hume's criticism of Sextus Empiricus's account of the 'Origin of all religious Worship' in 'the Utility of inanimate Objects' in the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* shows him (briefly) engaged by the topic of the *Natural History* by 1751.¹¹⁹ Yet Bolingbroke's essays on polytheism and monotheism did not appear before the public until 1754. Of course the nature of Hume's dissertation is such that it may have come together in parts, and Bolingbroke was not (as we have seen) the only contemporary advocate of an original monotheism. Yet, as I have argued, there is some reason to regard him as being, by 1755, the most prominent. If this is so then perhaps we should read the comment to Millar as laying down a false scent. Did the *Natural History of Religion* then come together later than has been supposed? But we do not need to linger on this question. Instead I should like to turn in conclusion to consider the implications of this chapter's broader thesis: that Hume used the *Natural History* to launch an attack on some of the most cherished historical arguments of earlier eighteenth-century freethinkers.

Some of the best recent scholarship on Hume has been exercised in recent years by the answers he offered to the question Pierre Bayle had first posed in his *Pensées diverses sur la comète* (1682): is it possible for there to be a society of virtuous atheists?¹²⁰ John Robertson, in particular,

¹¹⁸ Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1980), 321; A. Wayne Colver, 'Note on the Text', in David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion and Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. A. W. Colver and J. V. Price (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 7; Webb, 'The Argument of the *Natural History*', 142; Beauchamp, 'Introduction', xx; Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, 309 and n. 93. But the careful Stewart allows for the possibility of a later date ('Dating of Hume's Manuscripts', 288–89; 'Hume's Intellectual Development', 47).

¹¹⁹ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (London, 1751), 28.

¹²⁰ Pierre Bayle, *Pensées diverses sur la comète*, ed. A. Prat, rev. P. Rézat, 2 vols (Paris, 1994), vol. II, 102–5 (ch. CLXXII). Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, vol. II, 246, 328; James A. Harris, 'Answering Bayle's Question: Religious belief in the moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. D. Garber and S. Nadler, vol. 1 (Oxford, 2004), 230–53, at 247–53.

has suggested that the ultimate purpose of Hume's *Natural History of Religion* is to show that 'in our morals, we are . . . sociable atheists'.¹²¹ Yet if this attractive case is to stand, it must account for the apparent professions of theism that Hume makes at various points in the dissertation.¹²² The response that has generally been given is to suggest that these are concessions made 'for the sake of argument'¹²³ or as 'uncritical lip-service'.¹²⁴ Yet I confess that I remain a little uneasy about this defence—not least because Hume, elsewhere so scathing about inconsistency in others (such as Mandeville), also takes occasion in the *Natural History* to attack the view of 'some libertines' that the Arianism or Socinianism of Newton, Locke, and Clarke was merely a hypocritical cover for their true beliefs.¹²⁵ It seems a reproach to the intelligence of Hume's writings simply to suppose him to have been a hypocrite.

There are nonetheless at least two ways we might escape this interpretative *impasse*. The first arises from a cautious reading of what Hume actually says in the apparently 'theistic' passages of the *Natural History of Religion*. For while he explicitly acknowledges the force of the argument from design—as he also does in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*—Hume does not perhaps quite commit himself to it.¹²⁶ He says, for instance, that we 'must adopt . . . the *idea*' of an intelligent cause; he does not say that such an author of nature must exist.¹²⁷ An analogous situation obtains with respect to the rational enquirer who, at the outset of the dissertation, finds himself unable to 'suspend his belief a moment' with regard to the 'primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion'—principles which are nonetheless left carefully unstated.¹²⁸ By the close of the *Natural History*, Hume has arrived at the apparently contradictory view that doubt, uncertainty, and 'suspence of judgment' appear 'the only result of our most accurate scrutiny, concerning this subject.'¹²⁹ As in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, the point may be that after

¹²¹ Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, 316.

¹²² On this point see also Russell, 'Hume on Religion', §4.

¹²³ Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, 310; Falkenstein, 'Hume's Project', 15. See also Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, vol. II, 22–23, and 239.

¹²⁴ Terence Penelhum, *Themes in Hume: The Self, the Will, Religion* (Oxford, 2000), 211.

¹²⁵ Hume, *Natural History*, 91 n. (§xii). For the attack on the 'very inconsistent' Mandeville, see David Hume, 'Of Luxury', in *Political Discourses* (Edinburgh, 1752), 39.

¹²⁶ Here I agree with P. J. E. Kail, 'Understanding Hume's *Natural History of Religion*', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 57 (2007), 190–211, at 197.

¹²⁷ Hume, *Natural History*, 112 (§xv) (my emphasis).

¹²⁸ Hume, *Natural History*, 1 (Introduction).

¹²⁹ Hume, *Natural History*, 116–17 (§xv).

we have taken a journey through the arguments, a different—and less dogmatic—answer has been arrived at.

The second way of accounting for the professions of theism in Hume's *Natural History* turns upon the nature of the polemic he is undertaking in it. Hume is not simply attacking the orthodox view that monotheism was the original religion of mankind by virtue of having been transmitted historically from Adam and the Patriarchs. He is also attacking the apologetic defence of this view that had been mounted by authors such as Ramsay, which deliberately forbore from appealing to the sacred quality of this Hebraic history. Finally, Hume is also ultimately attacking the theist historical thesis, associated above all with Bolingbroke, that—let the Hebrews themselves be rank idolaters—the 'unity of God' had nonetheless been 'discovered by reason' in the very earliest human societies.¹³⁰ This bogus historical search for wise heathens who established an ancient monotheism is, we are to understand, over.

Hume has therefore moved on from the critique of priestcraft and revealed religion that had hitherto engaged the freethinkers, of whom it is conventional to see Bolingbroke as the last. One purpose of the *Natural History* certainly is to expose the ridiculousness and implausibility, in Hume's view, of the Christian religion (as well as, of course, the Hebraic, the Mohametan, and the Zoroastrian religions). And its philosophical model of the flux and reflux between monotheism and idolatry also bore fruit in Hume's account of the encounter between the 'idolatrous worship' of the ancient Gauls and Britons, their 'tolerating conquerers' the Romans, and the 'corrupt species' of Christianity that eventually prevailed, in the first chapter of his *History of England* (1761).¹³¹ But perhaps an even more important purpose of the *Natural History of Religion* is to undermine the historical case that theists and freethinkers had made for the existence of 'the one true God'.¹³² Hume's natural history thus offers a pointed corrective to histories, like Bolingbroke's, of the rise and progress of theism. It suggests that it is jejune to explain the 'universal propensity to believe in invisible, intelligent power' in terms of a declination from any kind

¹³⁰ Bolingbroke, 'Essay the Third', in *Philosophical Works*, vol. II, 237. For parallel accounts emphasising Hume's philosophical differences from deism see James O'Higgins, 'Hume and the Deists: A contrast in religious approaches', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 22 (1971), 479–501, and Kail, 'Understanding Hume's *Natural History*'.

¹³¹ David Hume, *The History of England, From the Invasion of Julius Cæsar to the Accession of Henry VII*, 2 vols (London, 1761–62), vol. I, 1–45 (quotations from 4, 43). I owe this thought to Dr Damian Valdez.

¹³² To quote Bolingbroke, 'Essay the Third', in *Philosophical Works*, vol. II, 215.

of original purity, whether it be Hebrew or Egyptian. Hume's primary quarrel in the *Natural History of Religion* is therefore not with Christian revelation—that battle had, from Hume's perspective, already been won—so much as it is with the divine histories of the freethinkers. Hume may have learned to oppose 'one species of superstition to another', and thereby 'set them a quarrelling' (as he put it at the very end of the *Natural History*), from the debates over the priority of the ancient religions with which I have shown he was familiar.¹³³ But he goes beyond those histories to parody the arguments of the freethinkers—Shaftesbury's political arithmetic of ancient Egypt, Bolingbroke's defence of ancient monotheism—in order to undermine their own arguments in favour of a deity. Religion certainly does have a natural history, Hume is suggesting, but its ultimate significance is neither Eusebian nor Egyptian; and not even freethinkers can safely invoke it in support of their theism.

¹³³ Hume, *Natural History*, 114, 117 (§xv).

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INDEX

- d'Abano, Pietro 129
 Abraham 278
 de Acosta, José 139
 Historia natural y moral de las Indias 34
 Adam 23, 30, 42, 90, 137, 151, 160, 172, 175, 294
 Aeltius, Godeschalcus 60, 62
 Querela Pacis 60
 Aikenhead, Thomas 6
 Altdorf 86, 87
 Amsterdam 15, 16, 17, 31, 58, 62, 69, 70, 115, 171, 181, 182, 187, 189, 194
 Aquinas, Thomas 20, 21, 215, 216
 Arianism 3, 6, 55, 251, 256, 263, 293
 Arminius, Jacob 55, 56, 62, 171
 (see also Remonstrants)
 Arnauld, Antoine 166, 218, 222
 Ark, Noah's, built in China 137
 Of the Covenant 277
 Artificial language 138–9, 149–53
 Ashley Cooper, Anthony, third earl of
 Shaftesbury 277–82, 284, 285, 295
 Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times 277
 Assyria, Assyrians 32, 36
 Astrology 124, 128–9
 Atheism 5, 43, 98, 107, 112, 113, 123, 129, 179, 184, 187, 196, 198, 200, 285
 Atomism 3
 Aubrey, John 108, 142
 Augustine of Hippo 7, 23, 26, 28, 160, 178, 212, 215, 220
 Avril, Philippe 148

 Babel 30, 34, 137, 150
 Babylonians 145, 147
 Bailey, Arthur 142
 Ball, Nathaniel 288
 Balling, Pieter 181, 195
 Barbeyrac, Jean 66, 179
 Barlow, Thomas 116
 Basle 76, 77, 94
 Basnage de Beauval, Henry 161
 Histoire des Ouvrages des Sçavans 161
 Baxter, Richard 106
 Bayle, Pierre 42–3, 67, 98, 155–80, 183, 187, 190, 212, 259

 Commentaire Philosophique 155, 158, 159, 165–7, 176–7, 178–9
 Ce que c'est que la France toute Catholique 165
 Dictionnaire historique et critique 175, 177–8, 188
 Pensées diverses 292
 Beale, John 139
 Bekker, Balthasar 185–6, 187, 188
 Bentley, Richard 244–5
 Bernard, Jean-Frédéric 187
 Cérémonies et coutûmes religieuses 187–91
 Bible 12, 22, 28, 35, 36, 40, 70, 73, 117, 171, 182, 193, 194, 199, 200, 264, 284, 288
 textual scholarship of 26–32
 Septuagint 26–7, 29, 30, 34, 146, 153
 Vulgate 28–9, 31, 34, 38, 146
 Beza, Theodore 57, 59, 60, 62
 Birch, Thomas 285
 Blom, Hans 12, 40, 43
 Blount, Charles 114, 116, 270
 Great is Diana of the Ephesians 134
 Life of Appollonius 114
 Bochart, Samuel 32, 271, 272
 Geographia Sacra 271
 Bodleian Library, Oxford 143, 144
 Boethius 215
 Boevey, James 143
 Bogerman, Johannes 57, 69
 Böhme, Jacob 121
 Bolingbroke, see St John, Henry, Viscount Bolingbroke
 Boswell, James 288
 Boyle, Robert 3, 114, 128–34, 143, 144
 Essay of the Holy Scriptures 130
 Free Enquiry into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature 42, 129–32
 Boym, Michal 140
 Bramhall, John 103–5, 110
 Bredenburg, Johannes 183, 190, 195
 Brentius, Johannes 56
 Brooke, John 124
 Brook, Zachary 254–9
 Bruno, Giordano 3, 129, 258
 Bullinger, Heinrich 122
 Burton, John 250, 259, 264
 Buxtorf, Johan 27

- Calvin, John 11, 52
 Calvinism 14, 40, 53, 59, 63, 82, 161
 Campanella, Tommaso 3, 175, 215
 Cappel, Louis 27, 29
 Critica sacra 27, 29
 Cardano, Girolamo 3, 128, 129
 Carmichael, Gershom 7
 Casaubon, Isaac 273
 Catholic Church 10–19, 21–22, 28–36, 42,
 44, 53, 93, 217, 230, 232, 241, 242
 Chalcedon, Council of 8
 Chaldeans 32, 131, 147
 Chapman, John 257, 258
 Charles II 103, 110, 126, 164
 Chillingworth, William 247, 261, 264
 China 34, 42, 135–53, 230
 Chinese characters 137, 140, 142–3, 149,
 151–2
 Chinese Rites controversy 35, 135
 Christ 8, 20–30, 32–3, 36–9, 44, 61, 70, 75,
 77–8, 80, 89, 91, 97, 105, 106, 112, 116, 127,
 128, 129, 157, 172, 182, 186, 191, 194–5, 201,
 213, 214, 248, 251, 253, 260
 Chubb, Thomas 258
 Church, Thomas 254, 258, 260
 Church of England 6, 14, 27–8, 114, 239
 Cicero 60, 235, 240–5, 257, 258
 Clark, John 67
 Clarke, Samuel 285, 293
 Clement XI 15, 135
 Cleyer, Andreas 140, 144
 Collegiants 14, 43, 50, 182–3, 187–8, 190,
 193, 195, 199, 200–1
 Collins, Anthony 160, 193
 Comber, Thomas 257–8
 Condillac, Étienne Bonnot de 234
 Confucius, Confucianism 34–5, 42, 44,
 135, 142–4, 230
 Contra-Remonstrants 40, 48, 55–6, 60–4,
 73, 158
 Conway, Edward 124–5
 Cook, Harold 49
 Coornhert, Dirk 51, 59, 60, 64, 67, 69
 Proces van 't ketterdooden 53
 Cosimo de Medici I 76
 Couplet, Philippe 142, 150
 Covetus, Jacobus 76–8, 94
 Creation 26, 33, 136, 140, 189, 216–17, 284
 Crell, Johan 24, 41, 81, 85–94
 Ad Librum Hugonis Grotii 86–90
 Vindiciae Pro Religionis Libertate 93
 Crispo, Giovanni Battista 122
 Croce, Benedetto 208
 Crook, Andrew 109, 115
 Crook, William 115
 Crouch, Nathaniel 96–7, 117
 The kingdom of darkness 96–7
 Cudworth, Damaris 167
 Cudworth, Ralph 3, 95, 122–3, 131, 273,
 289–91
 True Intellectual System 122, 271,
 284–5, 291
 Curley, Edwin 107, 109
 Curll, Edmund 114
 Cyprian 251
 Della Porta, Giambattista 3
 Delft 51
 Demoniac possession 251
 Descartes, René 166, 182, 215, 218, 219,
 222, 230
 Diderot, Denis 191, 192, 195, 197, 198, 201
 Dodwell, William 254, 258, 263
 Doria, Paolo Mattia 43–4, 205–6, 229–34
 Dort, Synod and Canons of 10, 14, 162, 166
 Du Chesne, Joseph 126
 Dunn, John 4, 5
 Duns Scotus 215
 Edict of Nantes
 Revocation of 157, 162
 Efendi, Mahomet 179
 Egypt, Egyptians 32, 33, 36, 45, 137–8, 145,
 268, 271, 273–83, 286, 287, 295
 Ellis, Mark 62
 Elzevier, Dutch publishing house 17–18
 Enden, Fransiscus van den 181
 Enlightenment 2, 4–7, 43, 97, 107, 116,
 133, 134, 163, 180, 181, 191–3, 197, 201, 206,
 208, 214, 228, 233–4, 237, 242, 244–5,
 259, 283
 Epicurus, Epicureanism 3, 23, 44, 103, 191,
 214, 269
 Episcopus, Simon 14
 Erasmus, Desiderius 60, 78, 244
 Erastianism 12, 62, 68–9, 104
 Eusebius of Caesarea 252, 272, 274
 Preparation for the Gospel 272
Evidences of the Kingdom of Darkness 117
 Exclusion Crisis 156, 169
 Exorcism 251, 259
 Ezra 26, 29, 37
 Falconer, John 139
 Fall of Man 123, 160, 172, 175, 190
 Ferguson, Adam 5
 Filesac, Jean 126, 128
 De idololatria magica 126

- Fischer, Christian Gabriel 132–3
Vernünftige Gedanken über die Natur 132
- Fisher, Samuel 105
- Flood, the 33, 34–5, 136, 258
- Florence 76
- Fohi 137, 140
- Forbes, Duncan 5
- Formula of Concord 86
- Frederick the Great, King of Prussia 195
- Frederik Henry, Prince of Orange 62
- Frend, William 191
- Frijhoff, Willem 53
- Gale, Theophilus 271, 272
The Court of the Gentiles 271
- Gale, Thomas 151
- Galen, Galenic theory 127, 129, 130, 142
- Galileo Galilei 3, 215, 217, 221–2
Dialogue of the Two Great World Systems 221
- Galiani, Celestino 232
- Galiani, Ferdinando 180
- Garrick, David 288
- Gassendi, Pierre 3, 166
- Gauthier, David 4
- Geneva 10, 11, 18, 171
- Genovesi, Antonio 180, 232
- Gentile, Giovanni 208
- Geyl, Pieter 62
- Giannone, Pietro 38, 44, 232
Storia civile del Regno di Napoli 17, 18, 39
Tirregno 39
- Gibbon, Edward 45–6, 199, 202, 228, 237, 246, 252, 261–2, 274
History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire 45–6
- Ginsburg, Carlo 16
- Glisson, Francis 131
- Golius, Jacobus 144, 149
- Grandi, Guido 13
- Greatrakes, Valentine 42, 124–7, 130, 133
- Greaves, John 144
- Grevinchovius, Caspar 53–4, 55
- Grotius, Hugo 22, 24, 28, 30, 40–1, 43, 47, 49, 50, 59, 61, 64–73, 81–94
Defensio Fidei 82–3, 84, 85, 86
De iure belli ac pacis 65–7, 71, 72, 84–5
De iure praedae commentarius 65, 71, 72, 83–4
De Veritate 66, 67, 70, 73
Parallelon rerum publicarum 65–6, 68
- Gundling, Niklaus Hieronymus 200
- Haak, Theodore 141
- Haarlem 51
- Hale, Matthew 138
The Primitive Origination of Mankind 138
- Hallywell, Henry 95, 117
Melampronoea, or, A discourse of the polity and kingdom of darkness 95–6
- Ham 137
- Harrington, James 6
- Harrison, Peter 124
- Hattem, Pontiaan van 189
- Heathcote, Ralph 264, 288
- Heidanus, Abraham 122
De origine erroris 122–3
- Helvetic Consensus 10
- Helvétius, Claude-Adrien 198, 201, 202, 234
- Henshaw, Thomas 141
- Herbert, Edward, baron of Cherbury 33, 134
- Hermetic corpus 206, 229, 231, 273
- Hervey, John 248, 249, 250, 263
- Heresy 3, 9, 10–11, 13, 15, 16, 18, 29, 54, 56, 57, 122, 124, 151, 161
- Herodotus 280
- Hinckelmann, Abraham 122
- Hoadly, Benjamin 249
A Plain Account of the Nature and End of the Lord's Supper 249
- Hobbes, Thomas 4–5, 6, 27, 37, 38, 39, 41–2, 73, 94, 95–120, 166, 186, 193, 200, 211, 246, 270
Behemoth 102, 110, 112
A brief historical narration concerning heresie 102, 116
De Cive 5, 73, 109
Leviathan 5, 6, 37, 96, 101, 102–3, 105–6, 108–12, 115, 116–9, 269
- Holbach, Paul Henry Thiry, baron d' 191, 192, 198, 201
Système de la nature 195–7
- Holy Office (Inquisition), Congregation of 10–11, 16–17
- Holy Spirit 8, 20, 23, 172
- Hont, Istvan 4
- Hooke, Robert 42, 135, 136, 138, 141–3, 145, 149–53
- Hooker, Richard 239
- Hottinger, Johann Heinrich 130
Historia orientalis 130
- Huet, Pierre-Daniel 32, 272, 278
Demonstratio Evangelica 32, 271, 272
- Huguenots 6, 14, 42–3, 76, 156, 161–2, 164, 168, 277

- Hume, David 5, 7, 45, 46, 180, 199, 202, 242, 252, 258, 268–9, 270, 279–87, 289–95
Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion 268–9, 289, 293
Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals ('Second Enquiry') 269, 285, 292
History of England 294
Natural History of Religion 268–9, 280–87, 291–5
 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm' 269
Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding 289
Treatise of Human Nature 269, 282
- Hunter, Michael 131
- Hurd, Richard 288
- Hutcheson, Francis 7
- Hyde, Thomas 143, 144
Historia religionis veterum Persarum 280
- Idolatry 32, 33, 34–5, 38, 42, 121–4, 126, 128–9, 132–4, 268, 270–1, 280, 281, 283–5, 290–1, 294
- Inca 34
- Index of Prohibited Books 13, 16–17, 38
 Congregation of 16–17, 31
- Innocent XI 15
- Inquisition, see Holy Office
- Irenaeus 251
- Islam 121, 134
- Israel, Jonathan 2n, 43, 62, 63–4, 163, 208, 233, 234
- Jackson, John 256
- Jackson, Nicholas 103, 110
- Jacob, James R. 125–6, 128, 129, 131, 133
- James II 143
- Jansenism, Jansenists 14–15, 23, 38, 214, 229, 230–1
- Japhet 34
- Jebb, John 191–2, 195, 196, 197, 201, 202
- Jelles, Jarig 181, 183–4, 195, 201
- Jerome 28–9
- Jesuits, see Society of Jesus
- Johnson, Samuel 288
- Jones, Inigo 137
- Jortin, John 237, 262, 264
Remarks on Ecclesiastical History 262
- Jurieu, Pierre 43, 155, 156, 157, 158, 162, 167–8, 175, 176
- Justel, Henri 142, 148
- Kangxi, Emperor of China 135
- Kircher, Athanasius 137–8
Oedipus Aegyptiacus 282
- Kneller, Sir Godfrey 143
- Koerbagh, Adriaen 181, 183, 188, 199, 201
- Kolakowski, Leszek 50
Chrétiens sans Eglise 50
- Kuyper, Frans 183
- Labadie, Jean 55, 58
- Lactantius 121, 122
- Laud, William 103
- La Peyrère, Isaac 27, 42, 151
- Lawson, George 105
- Le Cène, Charles 171
- Le Clerc, Jean 14, 43, 67, 70, 161–2, 172, 174–5
Logica 174
Parrhasiana 174–5
- Leers, Reinier, publisher 18n
- Leiden 51, 55, 58, 60, 70, 73, 122, 144, 182, 186
- Leibniz, Gottfried 132, 140
- Leland, John 289
View of the Principal Deistical Writers of the Last and Present Century 289
- Lennon, Thomas 162
- Limborch, Philip van 170–1
- Lindsey, Theophilus 192
- Lipsius, Justus 61, 64, 69
- Livy 241
- Lloyd, David 127, 128
- Locke, John 4, 14, 42–3, 91, 98, 120, 155–80, 196, 230, 235–6, 239–40, 259, 265, 293
Essay Concerning Human Understanding 155–6, 163, 165–6, 169–70, 174, 176
Two Treatises 98, 168–9
Letter concerning toleration 98, 235
- Lodwick, Francis 42, 142, 149, 150, 151, 152
- London 16, 17, 115, 136, 141, 142, 143, 188, 198, 264
- Louis XIV 161, 168, 255
- Lubbertus, Sibrandus 68
- Lucretius 3, 30, 214
De Rerum natura 269
- Lucy, William 111
- Luther, Martin 9, 20, 52
- Luynes, Charles Honoré d'Albert, Duc de 15
- Mably, Gabriel Bonnot de 234
- Machiavelli, Niccolò 230, 256
- Maclean, Ian 124

- Magic 126–8
 Maigrot, Charles 135
 Maimonides 129, 270
 Malcolm, Noel 6, 26, 109, 116
 Malebranche, Nicholas 133, 166, 214, 215, 218–9, 222
 Mandeville, Bernard 214, 293
 Marshall, John 161–2
 Marsham, John 45, 275, 278, 279, 280, 281
 Cronicus Canon 273–4
 Martini, Martinio 34, 138
 Sinicae historiae decas prima 34
 Martyrdom 179, 252, 258
 Menasseh ben Israel 130
 Mennonites 47, 50, 58, 68, 184
 Mersenne, Marin 166
 Mexico 34
 Meyer, Lodewijk 181, 183, 194, 199, 201
 Philosophia S.Scripturae Interpres 186, 200
 Middleton, Conyers 15, 44–5, 235–65
 Free Inquiry 236, 238, 241, 242, 246, 247–53, 258–61, 263, 264
 Introductory Discourse 247, 254, 260, 264
 Life of Cicero 238, 241–4, 245–6, 253, 259, 264
 Letter from Rome 235, 240, 241, 242, 245, 246
 Vindication of the Free Inquiry 262–3
 Millar, John 5
 Milton, John 245
 Paradise Lost 245
 Mintz, Samuel 108
 Miracles 45, 53, 125, 127–9, 186, 194, 202, 213, 214, 217, 224, 225, 236, 248, 251–6, 258, 259, 261, 263
 Mohammad 129, 294
 Montaigne, Michel de 177–8
 Essais 177
 More, Henry 3, 95, 175
 Morin, Jean 29, 31
 Morone, Giovanni 11
 Moses 26, 29, 31, 32, 129, 275, 277, 278
 Mosheim, Johann 285
 Moseley, Richard 262
 Müller, Andreas 149, 150
 Mulsow, Martin 183
 Musaeus, Johann 194
 Naigeon, André 191, 195
 Naples 17, 18, 23, 38, 44, 232, 233
 Natural law 4–5, 6, 20, 21, 22–5, 31, 34, 36–8, 40, 66, 85
 Natural religion 22, 44–5
 Newton, Isaac 3, 293
 Nicea, Council of 8
 Nicole, Pierre 18n, 166, 173, 214
 Essais de morale 173
 Noah 35, 137, 138, 140
 Noodt, Gerard 67
 Nuzzo, Enrico 38
 Ockham, William of 215, 216
 Oldenbarnevelt, Johan van 14, 64
 Oldenburg, Henry 141
 Origen 231
 Original Sin 8, 25, 190, 263n
 Orphism 131
 Oxford, University of 27, 107, 188, 239, 254, 257n, 263
 Pajon, Claude 171
 Pantoja, Diego 139
 Papacy 10, 11, 13, 14, 28, 135
 Paracelsians, Paracelsianism 126, 128, 131
 Paris 17–18, 29, 31, 126, 143, 171, 198, 251, 286
 Parker, William 257–8
 Parkin, Jon 95n, 103, 107, 109
 Parliament of England 10, 14
 Pascal, Blaise 15, 17, 164, 172, 178
 Lettres Provinciales 17–18
 Paul, the Apostle 173, 216, 230n
 Paul IV 11, 16
 Pelagius 231
 Pepys, Samuel 110
 Pettit, Philip 100, 101
 Petty, William 279
 Pfaff, Christoph 274, 275
 Pitt, Moses, a printer 141
 Pius IV 16
 Phillipson, Nicholas 5
 Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society 138, 141
 Phinehas, 'true zeal' of 175
 Platonism 229
 Cambridge Platonism 3
 Neo Platonism 2, 121, 231
 Pocock, John 6–7, 245, 281n
 Port Royal 14, 15, 23
 See also Jansenism
 Pomponazzi, Pietro 127, 129
 Pope, Alexander 288
 Porphyry 274
 Possevino, Antonio 122
 Priestley, Joseph 43, 191–3, 195–9, 201–2
 Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit 196

- Prosperi, Adriano 11
 Providence, divine 27, 38, 44, 181, 184n,
 192, 197, 198, 202, 203, 240, 243, 262
 Vico's conception of 205, 208n, 212,
 214–28
 Quantin, Jean-Louis 239
 Rakow 81, 86, 92
 Ramsey, Andrew Michael ('Chevalier')
 281, 286–7, 289–90, 291, 294
 Philosophical Principles of Natural and
 Revealed Religion 281n, 287
 Remonstrants 14, 15, 24, 32, 40, 48, 54–6,
 58, 60–4, 67, 73, 158, 159
 Revolution of 1688–89 14, 168, 170
 Ricci, Giuseppe 218
 Ricci, Matteo 34
 Rieuwerts, Jan 181, 195
 Rijnsburg, near Leiden 182, 185, 187
 Robertson, John 234, 292
 Rogers, John 108
 Rome 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18n, 28, 29, 31,
 38, 122, 225, 235, 240, 241, 242, 243, 245,
 246, 257, 277
 Rook, John 114
 Rorty, Richard 95
 Rotterdam 17, 47, 156, 182, 183, 186, 187
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 234
 Royal Society of London 42, 128, 135, 136,
 138, 140–5, 148, 150, 152, 153
 Rüdiger, Andreas 132
 Rust, George 95
 Sabians 129, 130, 131
 Saldenus, Guiljelmus 54, 55, 57, 60, 61
 Scaliger, Joseph 26, 73
 Schelhammer, Günter Christoph 132
 Selden, John 130
 Semedo, Alvaro 137, 140, 149n
 Serrarius, Pieter 182
 Servetus, Michael 11
 Sextus Empiricus 292
 Shapin, Stephen 124
 Shen Fuzong 143
 Simon, Richard 17, 18n, 29–31, 105
 Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament
 18n, 29, 30, 31
 Histoire Critique du Nouveau Testament
 29, 30
 Simson, John 6–7
 Sinophilia 144–8, 152–3
 Skinner, Quentin 4, 5
 Slare, Frederick 141
 Smith, Adam 5, 7, 180, 289, 290n
 Smith, John 153n, 167
 Society of Jesus 13, 23, 33–5, 36, 42, 135,
 140, 146, 153 & n, 230, 231n
 Socinus, Faustus 23–5, 41, 76–81, 82–3,
 85–7, 90, 93, 94
 De Jesu Christo Servatore 77, 80, 81, 82
 Socinianism, Socinians 4, 14, 24, 30, 32,
 41, 43, 54, 55, 68n, 75–94, 121, 181, 182,
 183, 187, 188, 190, 191, 193, 194, 199, 200,
 201, 293
 Socrates 177, 178
 Sorbonne 13, 218
 Soto, Domingo de 21
 Spencer, John 32–3, 45, 274, 275, 277 & n,
 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283
 De Legibus Hebraeorum Ritualibus
 32–3, 274, 275, 278n, 281n, 283n
 On Urim and Thummim 274, 277n
 Spinoza, Baruch 2, 14, 17, 27, 30, 31, 37–8,
 39, 42, 43, 63, 105, 121, 133, 181–203, 211,
 230, 258, 269
 Tractatus Theologico-Politicus 17, 37, 269
 St John, Henry, Viscount Bolingbroke 45,
 263, 272, 278, 280, 284, 287–92, 294, 295
 Dissertation upon Parties 291
 Philosophical Works 288
 Stebbing, Henry 258, 262 & n
 Stillingfleet, Edward 32, 271, 272
 Origines Sacrae 271
 Stoicism 57, 121
 Strauss, Leo, also 'Straussian' 5, 232
 Stubbe, Henry 42, 121, 125–9, 131, 133, 134
 The Miraculous Conformist 125–6, 128,
 129
 Sturm, Johan Christoph 132
 Suarez, Francisco 21, 217, 218, 225
 Suetonius 252, 282
 Tiberius 282
 Tacitus 252, 282
 Annals 282
 Teellinck, Willem 54–5
 Third complaint of the church against
 the unholy tally-stick of the
 Remonstrants 54
 Temple, William 71
 Observations on the United Provinces
 71–2, 144–6
 Ten Rhijne, Willem 140–1
 Theophilus of Antioch 138, 251
 Thomasius, Jacob 122
 Toland, John 33, 36, 113, 114, 134, 270, 272,
 278, 280, 281, 284

- Christianity not Mysterious* 113
Letters to Serena 278
Origins of the Jews 272
 Toll, Frederick 254n, 263–4
 Tournefort, Joseph Pitton de 241
Traité des trois imposteurs 114
 Trenchard, John 114, 269, 271
 Natural History of Superstition 269, 271
 Trent, Council of 10, 15, 16, 21, 28, 31, 166
 Trevor-Roper, Hugh 237, 244–5, 261n
 Trigault, Nicholas 140
 Trigland, Jacobus 51, 58–60, 69
 Trinity 8, 11, 20, 24, 25, 32, 45, 75, 182, 187, 189, 244, 286
 Tuck, Richard 107
 Tyrrell, James 156

 Urban VIII 222
 Urk, a disputatious Dutch village 48
 Ussher, James 130
 Utrecht 63

 Vanini, Giulio 258
 Vespasian 107, 252
 Vico, Giambattista 38–9, 44, 205–28, 229, 230–31 & n, 232–4
 De antiquissima Italorum sapientia 210, 219–20
 De Constantia 220–3
 De Uno 210, 220–3
 Diritto universale 210, 220–1
 Scienza Nuova 38, 44, 209, 210, 212, 223–6, 228
 Vincent, Nathaniel 142
 Vitoria, Francisco de 21
 Voetius, Gisbertus 54, 57
 Volney, Constantin François 198–9, 201
 Law of Nature or Principles of Morality, deduced from the physical constitution of Mankind and the Universe 198–9
 Voltaire 184n, 195, 199, 237
 Vondel, Joost van den 54
 Vossius, Dionysius 270n
 Vossius, Gerardus 65, 82, 122, 130, 270, 271
 De theologia gentili 122, 270

 Vossius, Isaac 27, 42, 135, 136, 138, 142, 144, 145–53
 ‘De artibus & scientiis Sinarum’ 145–7
 De poematum cantu 147–8

 Wallis, John 144
 Walpole, Horace 288
 Warburton, William 45, 249, 254, 282n, 284, 285–6, 289, 290
 Divine Legation of Moses 285–6
 Julian 254
 Warrender, Howard 4
 Waterland, Daniel 246n, 250, 256n, 260
 Webb, John 136–40, 141, 150, 152, 153
 An Historical Essay 136–40
 A Vindication of Stone-Heng Restored 137
 Wesley, John 236, 251, 254, 259, 262n
 Westminster Confession 10
 White, George 257–8
 Wiggerts, Cornelis 51, 58
 Wilkins, John 138–9, 142, 149, 151, 152, 153
 An Essay Towards a Real Character 138–9, 149
 Willis, Thomas 125
 William of Orange, William III 168, 169, 171
 Williams, Rowan 239
 Wilmerdonx, Simon 54
 Cort begryp der voornaemster dwalinghen 54
 Wilson, John 200
 Wittichius, Christopher 186
 Witsius, Hermann 275–8, 283n
 Aegyptiaca 275, 276, 278
 Witzel, Georg 52
 Wolff, Christian 132
 Wolzogen, Louis 200
 Wootton, David 5
 Wotton, William 144–5
 Wren, Christopher 141–2
 Wtenbogaert, Johannes 51n, 54, 65
 Wyermars, Hendrik 189

 Zoroastrianism 121, 280